TOKYOPOP
VOL. 1
Tantric
Stripfighter
Trina
STORY BY
KEN FAGGIO
ART BY
FERNANDO FURUKAWA

Tantric Stripfighter Trina Volume 1

Story by Ken Faggio

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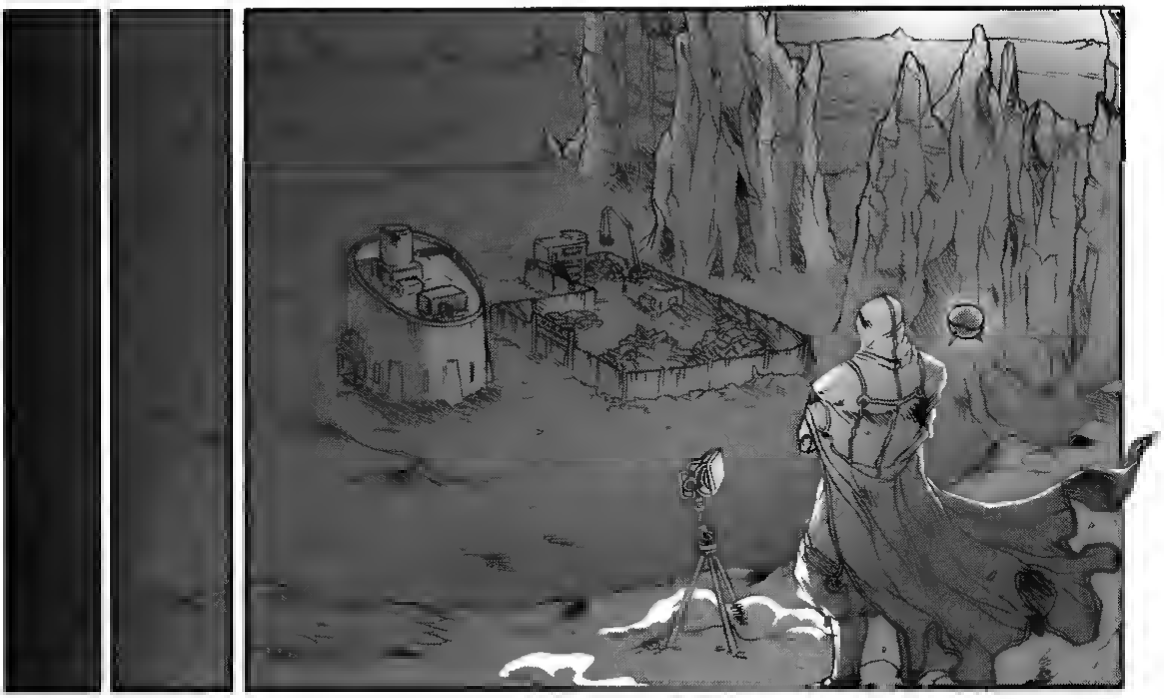
Tantric Stripfighter

TRINA

The Diamond Path
Volume 1

Written By Ken Faggio
Illustrated by Fernando Furukawa



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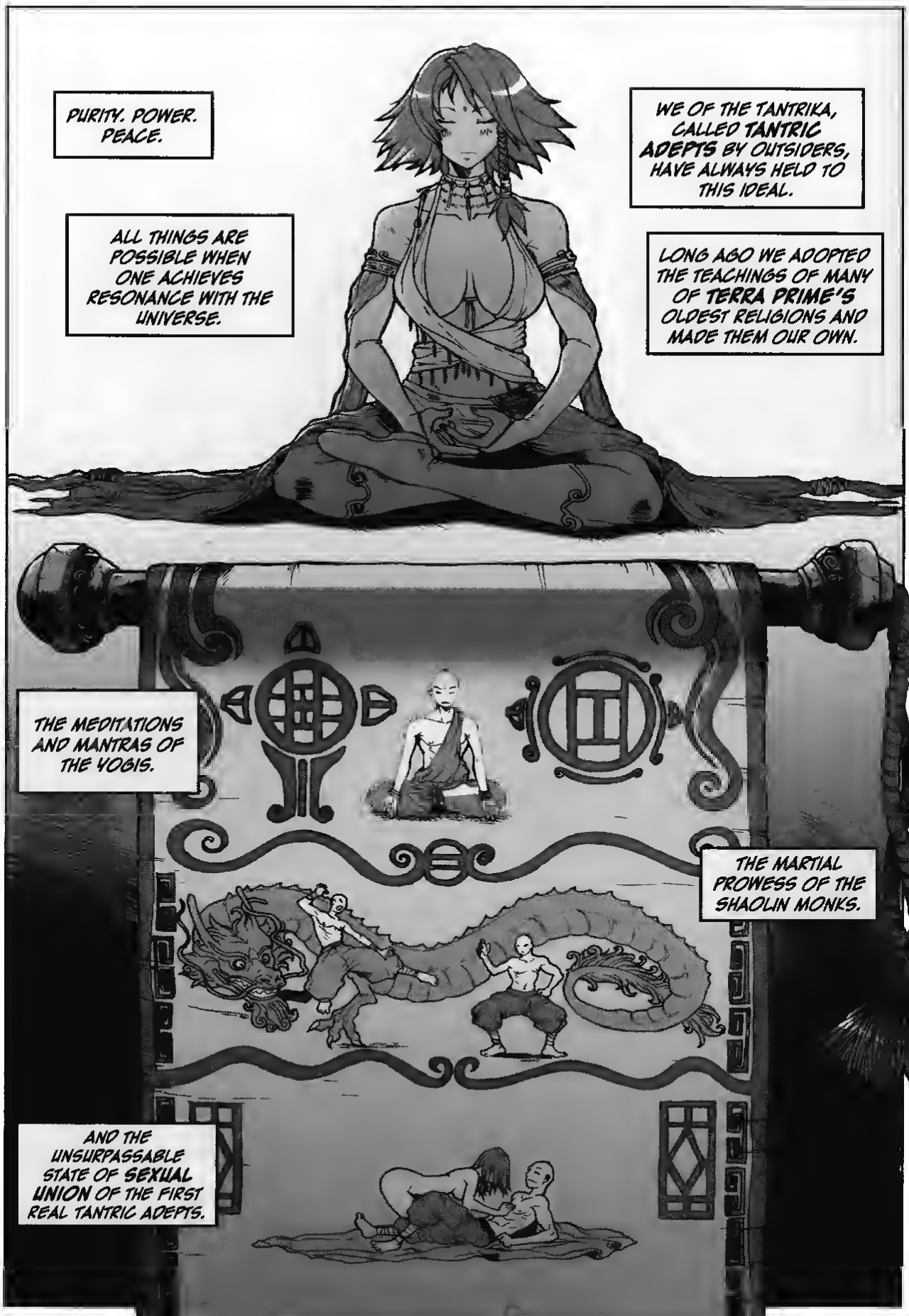
Chapter One
Flashback, Flash Forward


PURITY. POWER. PEACE.
ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WHEN ONE ACHIEVES RESONANCE WITH THE UNIVERSE.
WE OF THE TANTRIKA, CALLED TANTRIC ADEPTS BY OUTSIDERS, HAVE ALWAYS HELD TO THIS IDEAL.
LONG AGO WE ADOPTED THE TEACHINGS OF MANY OF TERRA PRIME'S OLDEST RELIGIONS AND MADE THEM OUR OWN.
THE MEDITATIONS AND MANTRAS OF THE YOGIS.
THE MARTIAL PROWESS OF THE SHAOLIN MONKS.
AND THE UNSURPASSABLE STATE OF SEXUAL UNION OF THE FIRST REAL TANTRIC ADEPTS.

WE BUILT A CITY THAT REFLECTED EACH OF THESE BELIEFS AND DEDICATED OURSELVES TO UNDERSTANDING THE UNIVERSE AND OUR PLACE
WE BECAME SO ENGROSSED IN OUR ESOTERIC STUDIES THAT WE LOST TOUCH WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD...
...AND PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE...

FOR FIVE STANDARD YEARS A WAR HAD RAGED BETWEEN A GENETICALLY MODIFIED LABOR FORCE CALLED GENETICS--OR GENIES--AND THE RULING CLASS OF TERRA PRIME KNOWN AS THE CROWN, AND ITS RELIGIOUS ARM, THE COG.
WE THOUGHT OUR NEUTRALITY IN THE CONFLICT WOULD ASSURE OUR SAFETY.
BLAM
WE WERE WRONG.

TRINA!
MOVE YOURSELF, GIRL! WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
AH!
KA-BOOM

TIRZAH!
T-TRINA...
IT'S OKAY, TIRZ!
I'LL GET US OUT OF HERE.
I PROMISE!
SHAME ON YOU.
DIDN'T YOUR MOMMA TEACH YOU NOT TO MAKE PROMISES YOU CAN'T KEEP?
WHEN WE'RE FINISHED WITH YOU, YOU'LL BE LUCKY IF YOU CAN STILL *WALK*, MUCH LESS BREATHE.

DON'T WORRY. IT'LL ONLY HURT THE FIRST DOZEN TIMES.
YEAH, THAT'S IT HONEY... JUST PLAY NICE AND YOU MIGHT ACTUALLY LIVE THROUGH THIS.
THE TIME FOR NICETIES HAS PASSED!
CRICK
THWACK
GUHH!

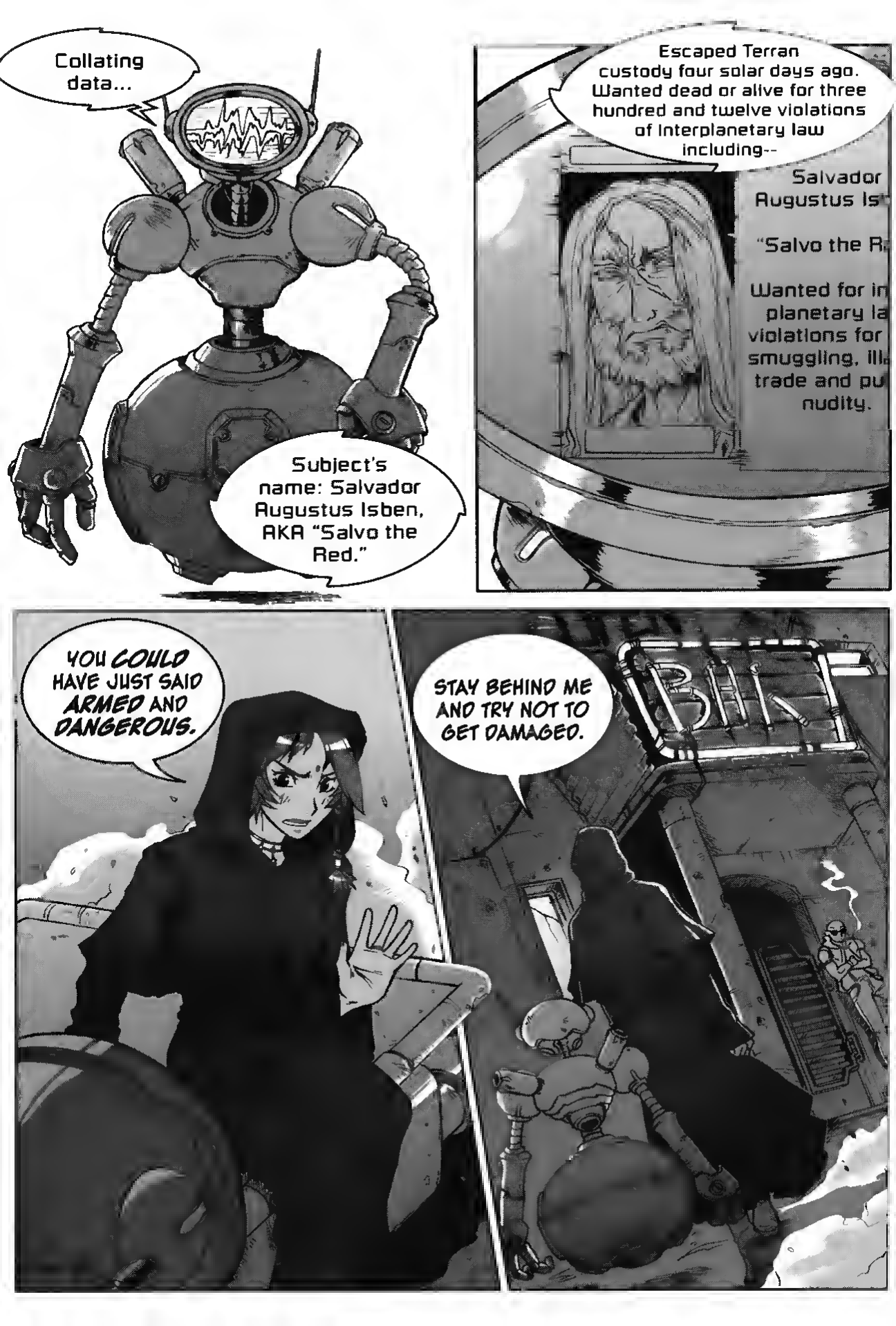
SKREEEE
YAH!
NNNH!
WHAM
BOOM

FWOOOOOSH
KSHRK
THWOOM
HUKK!
YOU'VE BEEN PRACTICING.
SIDHI KHAN WILL BE SO HAPPY...

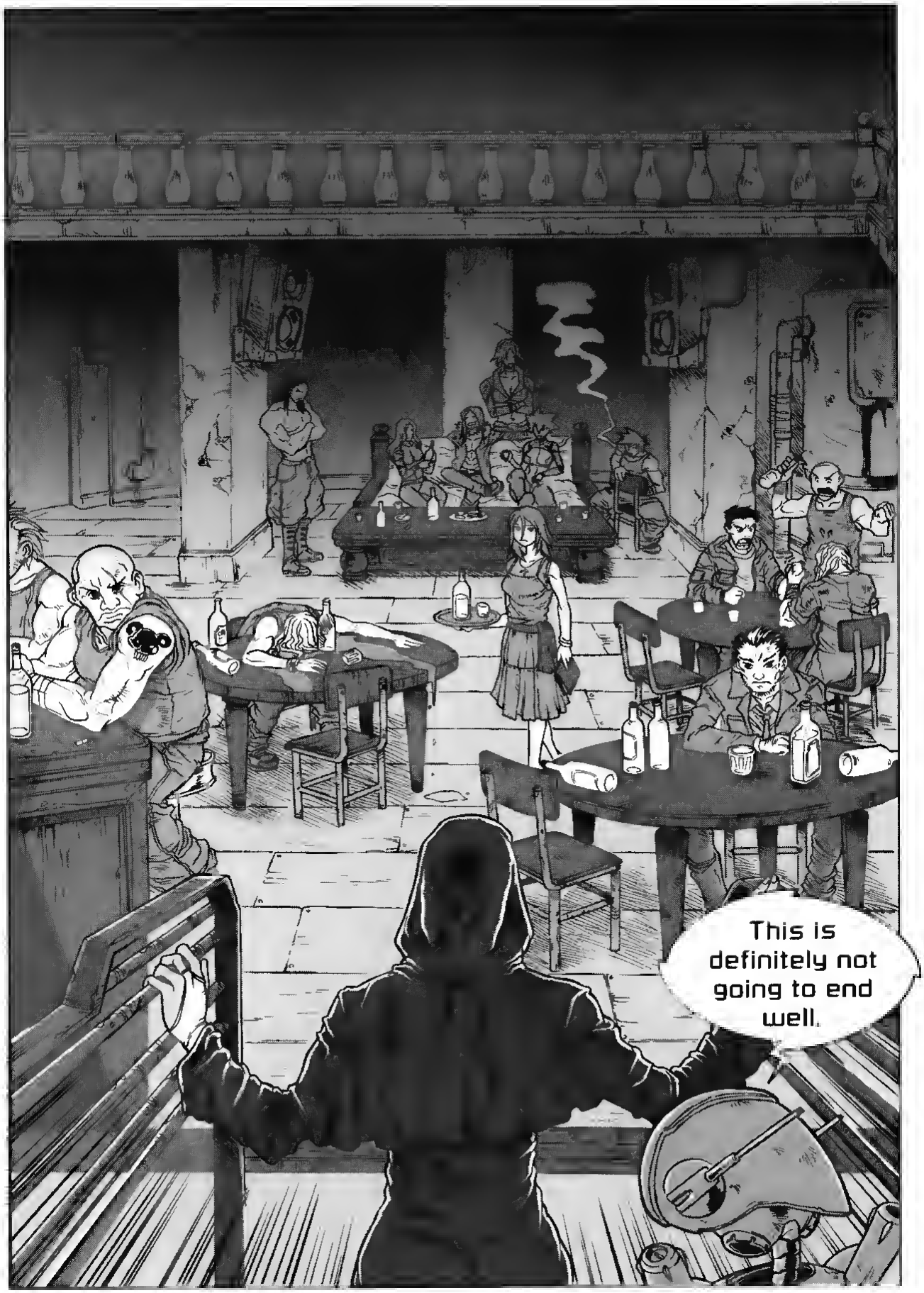
TIRZ, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!
I'M FINE... JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE TO CATCH MY BREATH.
SO, I GUESS ALL THE STUFF WE HEARD ABOUT TANTRIC WOMEN IS TRUE.
YOU LADIES COME WITH US AND NOBODY ELSE HAS TO GET HURT.
TRINA, FIND THE AMIDA AND GET OFF-PLANET AS QUICK AS YOU CAN!
TIRZAH! NO!!

HAVE IT YOUR WAY, THEN...!
KRACKA-BOOM!
KRACKA-BOOM!
KRACKA-BOOM!
KRACKA-BOOM!
KRACKA-BOOM!
TIRZAH!
TIRZAH!
TIRZAH!

TIRZAH...
TRINA...
Trina, we have arrived.
GIVE ME A RUNDOWN ON OUR JUMPER.
GOOD.


Collating data...
Subject's name: Salvador Augustus Isben, AKA "Salvo the Red."
Escaped Terran custody four solar days ago. Wanted dead or alive for three hundred and twelve violations of Interplanetary law including--
Salvador Augustus Is
"Salvo the R
Wanted for in planetary la violations for smuggling, ill trade and pu nudity.
YOU COULD HAVE JUST SAID ARMED AND DANGEROUS.
STAY BEHIND ME AND TRY NOT TO GET DAMAGED.
BHK

IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU GOT HERE! WE ORDERED GIRLS FROM THE HAREM OVER TWO HOURS AGO!
WHERE'S THE OTHERS?!
I AM ALL THERE IS, BUT BELIEVE ME, I AM WORTH EVERY PENNY.
REALLY? HOW ABOUT A SAMPLE?
CRACK
SORRY, I AM NOT IN A GIVING MOOD TODAY.
This is not going to end well...


This is definitely not going to end well.

Perhaps I should stay behind...?
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD.
SALVO THE RED?
YEAH, WHO WANTS TO...
KRUNK
WHOA!
HEY, SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU SWEETIE...BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO ORDERED A PLEASURE SLAVE.
ALTHOUGH...
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PLEASURE. IT IS STRICTLY BUSINESS.

TRINA DEVI.
CHIMERA CORPORATION. JUMPER RETRIEVAL SQUAD.
I AM HERE TO RETURN YOU TO TERRAN CUSTODY!
A BOUNTY HUNTER, HUH?
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO IF I DON'T WANT TO GO? LAP DANCE ME INTO SUBMISSION?
IN A WAY.
IF THIS IS SOME KIND OF JOKE, I'M NOT LAUGHING!

THIS IS NO JOKE...
WHAP
WHAP
YOU ARE COMING WITH ME!
THWACK
WHAM

AAAAHH!!
SLICE
FOOM
AAAHHH!!!
FWIP
SCHLUCK

IDIOTS!
I CAN'T BELIEVE THESE GUYS BROKE YOU OUT OF JAIL, SALVO!
THEY CAN'T EVEN GET OUT OF THEIR OWN WAY!
C'MERE, YOU LITTLE STICK FIGURE!!

UFF!
TK
TK
TK
TK
UHH!!
ARRR!!!
POW
OAH!
UFF!
WHAM
THWACK

CRASH
SALVO, GET YOUR MIND IN THE GAME! SHE'S NOT A PLEASURE SLAVE! SHE'S A TANTRIC STRIPFIGHTER!
STRIPFIGHTER? WHO CARES, JUST SHOOT HER!
BLAM
I'M TRYING! BUT SHE'S NOT--
--SO EASY--
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
--TO HIT!

HOW THE HELL--?!
FWAP
BETTER NOT TO ASK. JUST BE THANKFUL YOU ARE NOT THE ONE I AM AFTER.
ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
AS FOR YOU...
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT...
THOUGH I DOUBT YOU WOULD HAVE THE SENSE.
PUNT
OOOHHH...

Your banter with the criminal element was amusing, but was all of this violence really necessary?
I NEEDED THE PRACTICE.
Ahhh...
And what ancient martial art did you perform on her?
She appears to be having a seizure.
AHN...
I STIMULATED EVERY PLEASURE CENTER IN HER BODY.
IT IS NOT A SEIZURE--IT IS CALLED THE PALM OF ECSTASY.
Interesting...
NOW IF THERE ARE NO FURTHER QUESTIONS...
I WOULD LIKE TO RETURN THIS CHARMING GENTLEMAN TO YOUR OWNER AND SEE ABOUT OBTAINING A MORE PERMANENT POSITION WITH HIS BOUNTY HUNTING AGENCY.

BUT FIRST LET ME HELP YOU.
STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM ME!!
...
CALM DOWN, SISTER.
I AM FINISHED HURTING YOU TODAY.
Might I ask what you are doing?
QUIET NOW, SLEEP...
I AM EXAMINING THIS WOMAN'S WOUND.

THE KNIFE LEFT A DEEP INCISION AND I AM ATTEMPTING TO CLOSE IT.
This makes no sense.
That woman tried to kill you and now you are attempting to save her life?
I DO NOT KILL UNLESS IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. THIS WOMAN IS NO DOUBT A THIEF AND QUITE POSSIBLY A MURDERER, BUT HER ULTIMATE FATE IS NOT FOR ME TO DECIDE.
THERE, THE WOUND IS CLOSED. WE CAN LEAVE NOW.
HEY, SOMEONE WANT TO LOOSEN THESE CUFFS A LITTLE...?!

LOOK, SWEETIE--I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE...
...BUT WHATEVER CHIMERA IS PAYING YOU I CAN DOUBLE IT! I GOT CONNECTIONS!
THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE MONEY!
YOU ARE A STEPPING STONE, A PETTY THUG WHO IS GOING TO HELP ME BRING THE REAL CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE!!
PETTY THUG?! HONEY, YOU LET ME LOOSE AND I'LL SHOW YOU PETTY!
YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE AND YOU FAILED MISERABLY.
I AM NOT IMPRESSED.
YOU CRAZY BITCH!! NO JAIL CAN HOLD ME! I'LL GET YOU FOR THIS!
ONCE I GET FREE, I'LL GET YOU FOR EVERYTHING!!
THAP
THAP

YOU'LL SEE SALVO THE RED AIN'T SOMEONE TO BE MESSED WITH!!
BONDS, WOULD YOU MIND GAGGING OUR PRISONER? HE IS BEGINNING TO GIVE ME A HEADACHE.
HEADACHE?! I'LL GIVE YOU MORE THAN A HEADACHE!!
With pleasure, Trina.
WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH YOU, YOU WON'T HAVE... UMMPPFF!!!
IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, YOU ARE JUST THE FIRST OF MANY.
UMPH!
UMM!
UMMPH!

Chapter Two
Working Girl

Ganymede Trading Hub
Five Hours Later

CHIMERA JUMPER
RETRIEVAL SERVICE
I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU BACK SO SOON.

WHEN YOU FIRST CAME IN HERE LOOKING FOR A JOB, I THOUGH YOU WERE NUTS.

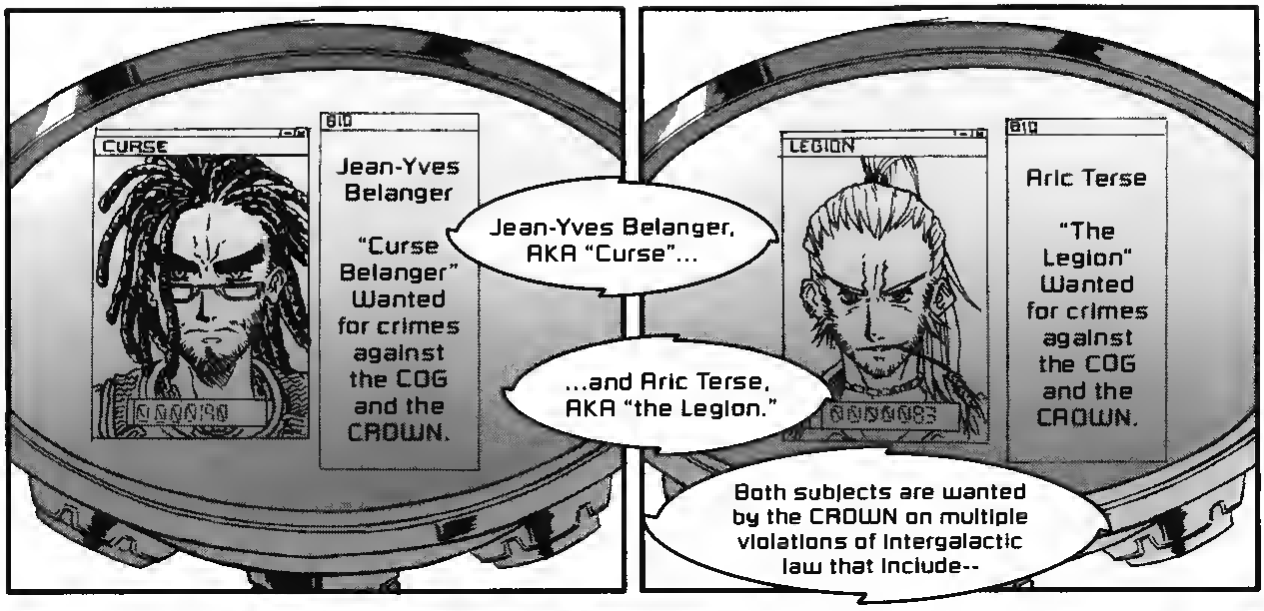
AND NOW, HERE YOU ARE AGAIN... AND YOUR FIRST CAPTURE TURNS OUT TO BE ONE OF THE MOST WANTED FUGITIVES IN COLONIZED SPACE.
TO SAY I'M IMPRESSED WOULD BE AN UNDER-STATEMENT.
BOYS, WOULD YOU MIND TAKING SALVO IN THE BACK FOR PROCESSING? ME AND THE LADY HAVE BUSINESS TO DISCUSS.
Grr!
SO, DO I GET THE JOB OR NOT?

EASY, GIRL! FIRST THINGS FIRST.
THE FACT THAT YOU EVEN MANAGED TO FIND SALVO IS PRETTY AMAZING, BUT HOW'D YOU INFILTRATE HIS HQ AND TAKE OUT EVERY ONE OF HIS MEN WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A LAS PISTOL FOR A WEAPON?
WHO IS TO SAY I DID NOT USE A LAS PISTOL?
I DOWNLOADED YOUR BOND BOT'S VISUAL RECORDS WHILE YOUR SHIP WAS IN TRANSIT.
DO YOU ALWAYS *SPY* ON POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES?
YEAH, ALMOST ALWAYS.
HONESTY IS HARD TO COME BY IN MY LINE OF WORK. SO HOW ABOUT *YOU* TELL ME THE TRUTH AND *I* DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU TO TAKE A WALK?

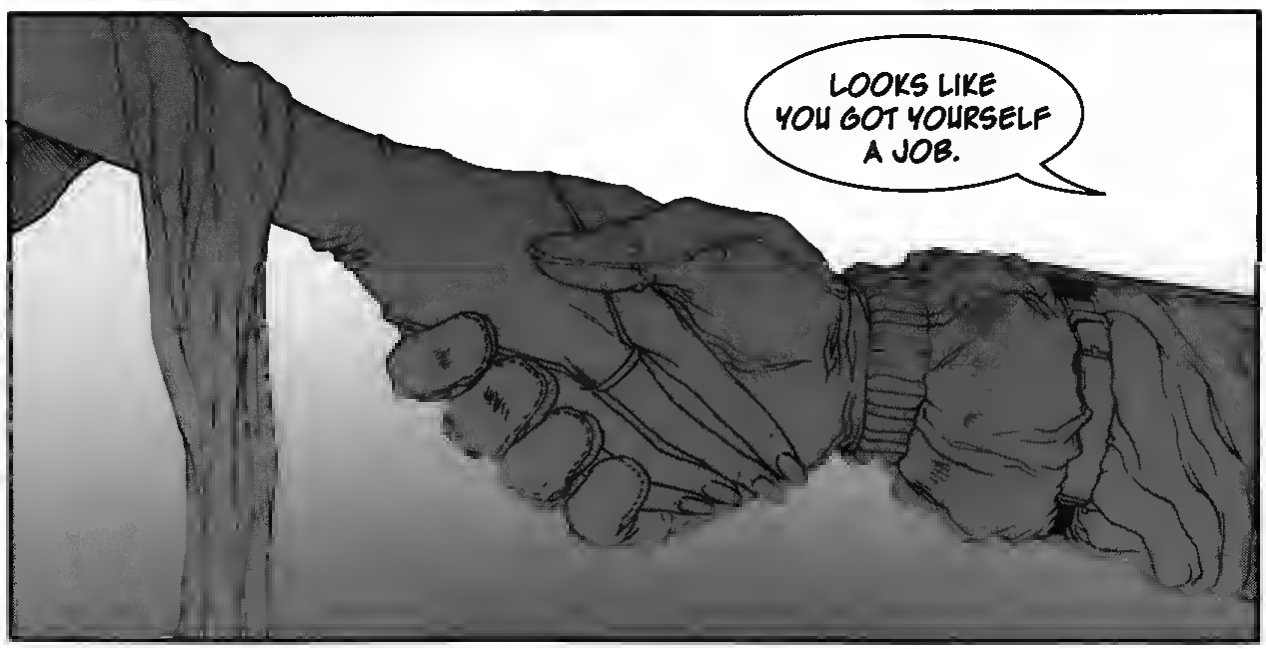
THERE IS NO GREAT SECRET TO MY METHODS. SIMPLY BEING A WOMAN HAS ITS ADVANTAGES.
...I-I SEE YOUR POINT.
MEN HAVE A TENDENCY TO UNDERESTIMATE ME BECAUSE OF THE WAY I LOOK.
THEY ARE FAR TOO BUSY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO BED ME THAN WORRYING IF I POSE ANY KIND OF THREAT.
AND I'M SURE THE FACT THAT YOU'RE A TANTRIC ADEPT DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE OUTCOME EITHER, HUH?
THE TANTRIC ADEPTS ARE ALL DEAD.

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT... BUT THIS VIDEO FEED TELLS ME OTHERWISE. UNLESS YOU'RE GOING TO TRY AND CONVINCE ME...
...YOU LEARNED THOSE MOVES WORKING AT A STRIP BAR...?
LET US SAY, JUST FOR ARGUMENT'S SAKE, THAT YOU ARE RIGHT AND I AM A TANTRIKA.
WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH THAT INFORMATION?
I'D KEEP IT BETWEEN ME AND YOU.
THERE'S NO STANDING BOUNTY ON TANTRICS. EVEN IF THERE WAS, FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF YOUR SKILLS YOU'D BE WORTH MORE TO ME AS A *HUNTER* THAN YOU WOULD BE AS *PREY*.
BESIDES, I DOUBT ANYONE I HAVE WORKING FOR ME WOULD STAND A CHANCE AGAINST YOU.

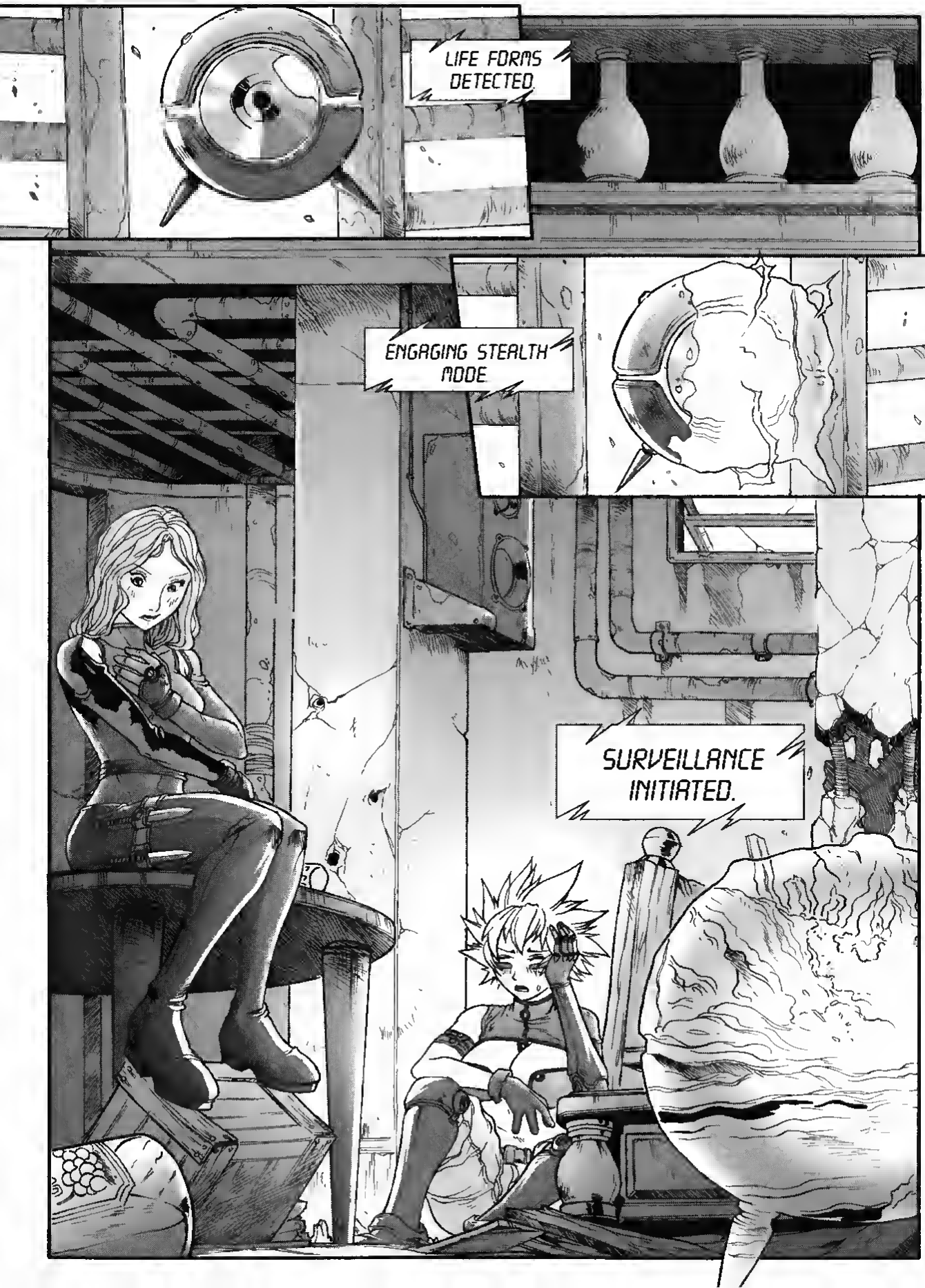
I'VE GOT ONE MORE QUESTION THOUGH--WHY BECOME A BOUNTY HUNTER?
THAT CRACK I MADE ABOUT BEING A STRIPPER AIN'T TOO FAR OFF THE MARK.
A GIRL WITH YOUR TALENTS COULD MAKE A NICE LIVING WORKING AT ONE OF THE UPSCALE CLUBS ON MARS OR LUNAR 1 AND NEVER RAISE AN EYEBROW ABOUT HER ORIGINS.
WHY CHOOSE TO BECOME A HUNTER?
VZZSH
THERE ARE CERTAIN MEN I WISH TO SEE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.
IT JUST SO HAPPENS THAT THESE SAME MEN ARE ON THE CROWN'S MOST WANTED LIST.
WHAT MEN?
BONDS?
Collating data...


CURSE
BIO
Jean-Yves Belanger
"Curse Belanger" Wanted for crimes against the COG and the CROWN.
Jean-Yves Belanger, AKA "Curse"...
...and Aric Terse, AKA "the Legion."
LEGION
BIO
Aric Terse
"The Legion" Wanted for crimes against the COG and the CROWN.
Both subjects are wanted by the CROWN on multiple violations of intergalactic law that include--

THAT IS ENOUGH, BONDS. HE GETS THE POINT.
TK
THOSE GUYS ARE WORTH SOME SERIOUS SCRATCH IF THEY'RE FOUND.
I ALREADY HAVE A LEAD ON ONE OF THEM.
ALL I NEED IS A SECTOR PASS AND A HUNTER'S LICENSE AND THEY ARE BOTH AS GOOD AS YOURS.


LOOKS LIKE YOU GOT YOURSELF A JOB.

INQUISITOR'S SURVEILLANCE LOG. OZRIC PRIME.
COG AND CROWN INQUISITOR TITUS BRAILLE RECORDING.
BEEP
OBSERVE AND RELAY.
WHOOSH
WHOOSH


LIFE FORMS DETECTED
ENGAGING STEALTH MODE
SURVEILLANCE INITIATED.

ABBEY, YOU ALRIGHT?
YEAH, I'LL BE FINE.
I JUST NEED TO CHANGE MY PANTS.
WHAT...?
FORGET IT.
Oooh, what did she do to me?
YEAH, WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? WHERE'S SALVO?
HE'S GONE. THAT TANTRIC BOUNTY HUNTER MUST HAVE TAKEN HIM AFTER SHE DID WHATEVER THE HELL IT WAS THAT SHE DID TO ME.

HEY! DIDN'T YOU GET STABBED?
I THOUGHT I DID. THERE'S BLOOD AND EVEN A HOLE IN MY SHIRT.
BUT LOOK-- NO CUT, NO NOTHING.
YEAH, NO WOUNDS HERE, EITHER. MAYBE TODAY'S OUR LUCKY DAY.
SOMEHOW...I DON'T FEEL SO LUCKY.

WHOOOSH
WHERE IS SHE?!!
WHERE IS THAT LITTLE STRIP-DANCING TWIG?!
I'LL TEAR HER SKINNY LITTLE ARMS OUT OF HER SOCKETS! I'LL--
CRASH
CALM DOWN, DEEZE.
YOU ACT LIKE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO GOT THEIR ASS HANDED TO THEM.
IT WAS A LUCKY PUNCH!
LOOKS LIKE IT WAS MORE THAN ONE.

A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS!
TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR. YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ABBEY?
I DON'T SEE NOTH--
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY?!

THAT
BITCH
I'M GOING TO KILL HER!!
I'LL MURDER HER!
KSHRK
I'LL TEAR HER APART!!
THOOOM
TINKLE
CRASH
NOW I KNOW WHY THEY CALL IT 'ROID RAGE.
SMASH

YOU'RE LEAVING? SALVO GETS TAKEN BACK TO PRISON AND YOU JUST WALK OUT?
WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF LOYALTY?
LOYALTY? LOOK-- I RAN GUNS FOR SALVO BECAUSE THE MONEY WAS GOOD.
I DIDN'T LIKE THE GUY, AND I'M NOT PART OF YOUR LITTLE BIKER SISTERHOOD.
I WAS HERE FOR THE MONEY AND NOW THAT IT'S GONE, SO AM I.
WELL, GUYS...IT'S BEEN FUN, BUT I'M OUT OF HERE.
BESIDES, IF I WERE YOU... I'D BE MORE WORRIED ABOUT THE BIG PICTURE.

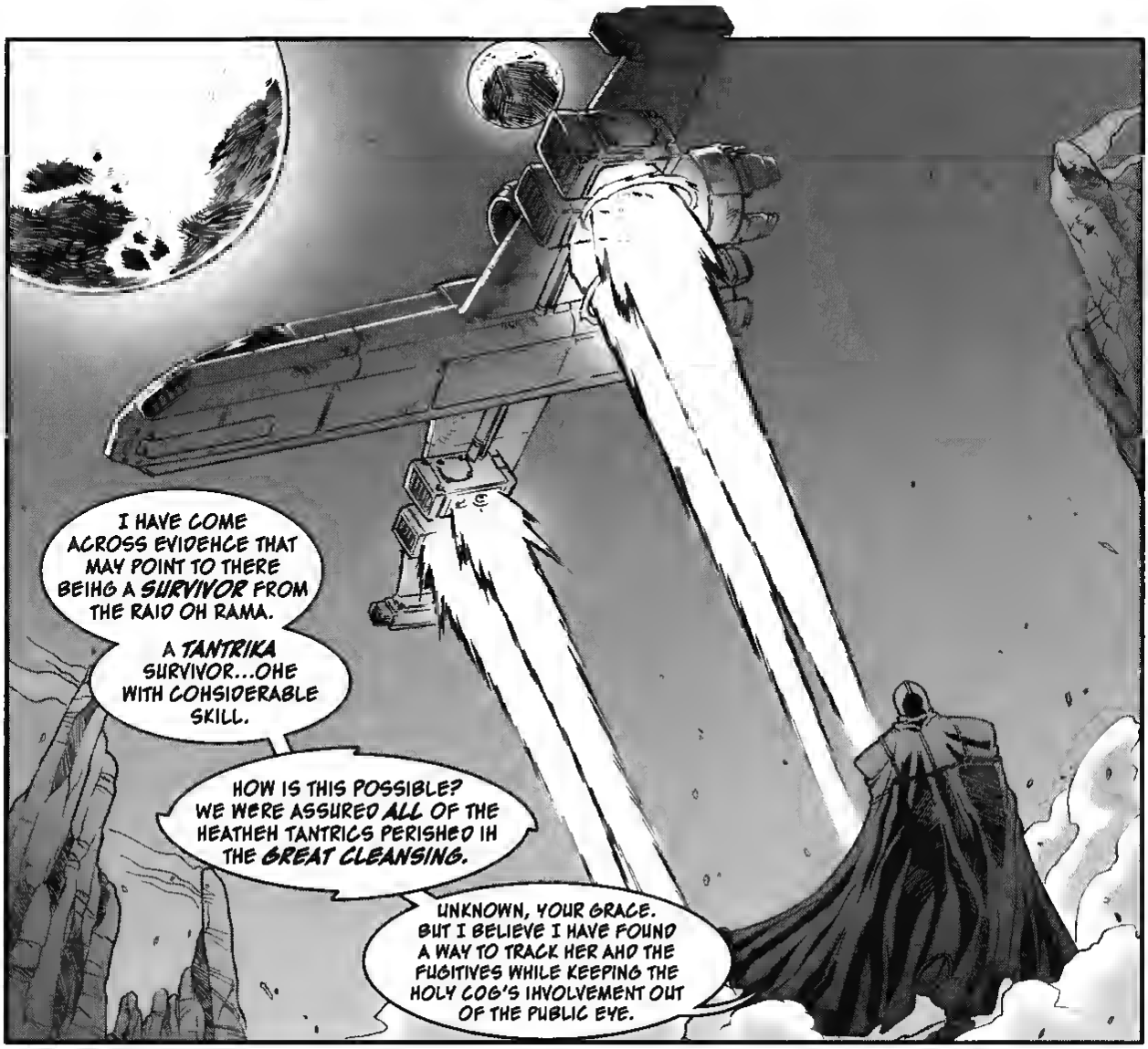
I'M WILLING TO BET THE TANTRIC BOUNTY HUNTER TIPPED THE CROWNIES OFF ABOUT THIS PLACE.
IF YOU'RE SMART, YOU'LL CLEAR OUT BEFORE THEY GET HERE.
UNLESS YOU MISS YOUR BOY SALVO SO MUCH YOU WANT TO JOIN HIM IN JAIL.
SO WHERE WILL YOU GO NOW?
TO FIND THE TANTRIC GIRL.
AND MAKE HER PAY?

NOT EXACTLY.
CLICK
SQUEEZE
MOVE A MUSCLE AND YOU'RE DEAD!
YOU ANOTHER BOUNTY HUNTER?!
WHAT I AM IS NO BUSINESS OF YOURS.
LEAVE NOW... WHILE YOU ARE STILL ABLE.
FUNNY, THAT ALMOST SOUNDED LIKE A THREAT.
YOU FORGET WHO'S HOLDING THE GUN?

I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN. IN FACT, I AM HERE TO REMIND YOU OF SOMETHING.
OH, YEAH? AND WHAT'S THAT?
PAIN!
EVERY PAIN, EVERY DISCOMFORT, EVERY AGONY EVER VISITED UPON YOU...FEEL IT AGAIN, AMPLIFIED A HUNDRED FOLD!
FWOOM

BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
TRANSMISSION ACKNOWLEDGED.
HOW MAY I SERVE LORD BISHOP?
IT HAS BEEN SEVERAL DAYS SINCE WE LAST HEARD FROM YOU, INQUISITOR BRAILLE.
THE GRAND REVERENCE IS AWAITING NEWS OF YOUR PROGRESS.
...WHAT IS THAT NOISE?
Gahh!
Ahhh!

A MINOR INTERFERENCE, YOUR GRACE.
ONE THAT I AM DEALING WITH NOW.
KRUNK
THE GRAND REVERENCE DOES NOT LIKE TO BE KEPT WAITING...!
I TRUST YOU HAVE NEW INFORMATION ON THE TWO FUGITIVES?
NOT EXACTLY, YOUR GRACE. THE LEAD I HAVE FOLLOWED TO OZRIC PRIME HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A FALSE ONE...
...BUT I HAVE OBTAINED OTHER INFORMATION THAT MAY BE OF AN EVEN GREATER INTEREST TO HIS HOLINESS.
IN WHAT WAY?


I HAVE COME ACROSS EVIDEHCE THAT MAY POINT TO THERE BEIHG A SURVIVOR FROM THE RAID OH RAMA.
A TANTRIKA SURVIVOR...OHE WITH COHSIDERABLE SKILL.
HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? WE WERE ASSURED ALL OF THE HEATHEH TANTRICS PERISHED IH THE GREAT CLEANSING.
UNKNOWN, YOUR GRACE. BUT I BELIEVE I HAVE FOUND A WAY TO TRACK HER AHD THE FUGITIVES WHILE KEEPING THE HOLY COG'S IHVOLVEMENT OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE.

BLIP

A NEW PATH HAS OPENED ITSELF UP TO ME. I HAVE ONLY TO PURSUE IT TO ITS LOGICAL END.
AND I AM CERTAIN IT WILL LEAD ME RIGHT TO THEM.

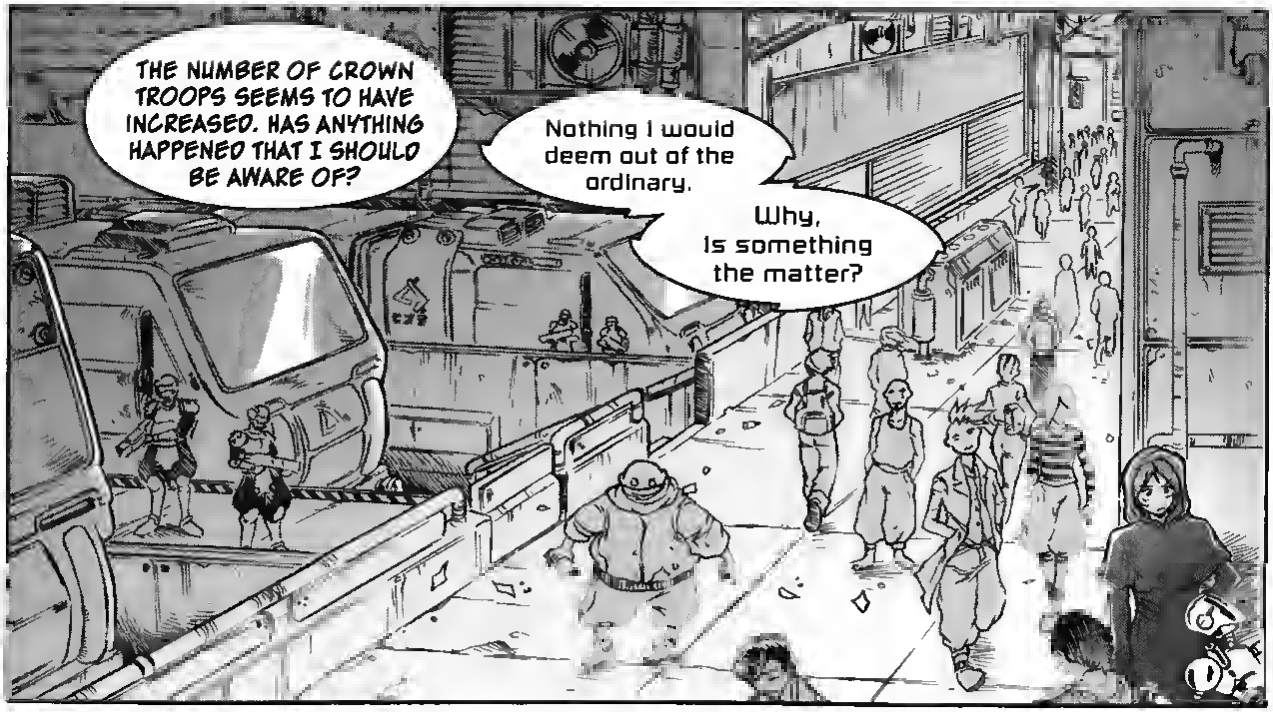
Chapter Three
Galaxy's Most Wanted

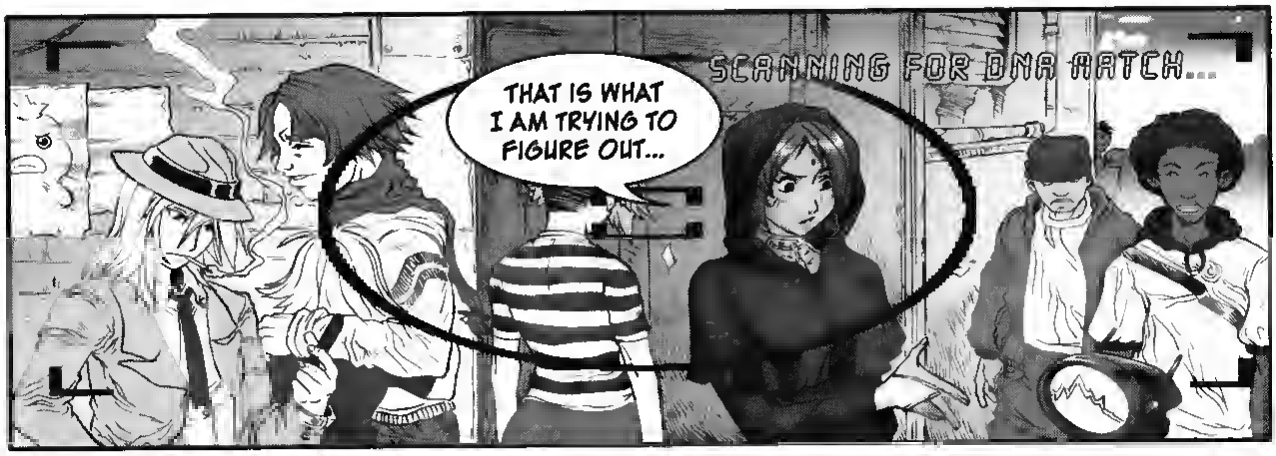
charon
jumpstation
Trina!

The next H-space ingress is in fifteen minutes
We need to get back to the ship and prepare for launch.
THANK YOU, BONDS.
I NEVER REALIZED THAT THESE STATIONS HAD PLACES LIKE THIS INSIDE.
Many of the larger jumpstations have solariums similar to this one.
They help to soothe travelers after a long voyage in the emptiness of space and also serve as a natural aid to the station's air purification systems.
YOU ARE TRULY A FOUNTAIN OF INFORMATION!
I was created to enlighten and inform.

TATION
ENTRAL
ECK
YOU CERTAINLY ARE...

HOW LONG WAS I MEDITATING FOR?
Approximately two and one quarter hours.


THE NUMBER OF CROWN TROOPS SEEMS TO HAVE INCREASED. HAS ANYTHING HAPPENED THAT I SHOULD BE AWARE OF?
Nothing I would deem out of the ordinary.
Why, Is something the matter?


SCANNING FOR DNA MATCH...
THAT IS WHAT I AM TRYING TO FIGURE OUT...

LET'S GET BACK TO THE SHIP.
DNA MATCH CONFIRMED

I WOULDN'T DO THAT IF I WERE YOU.

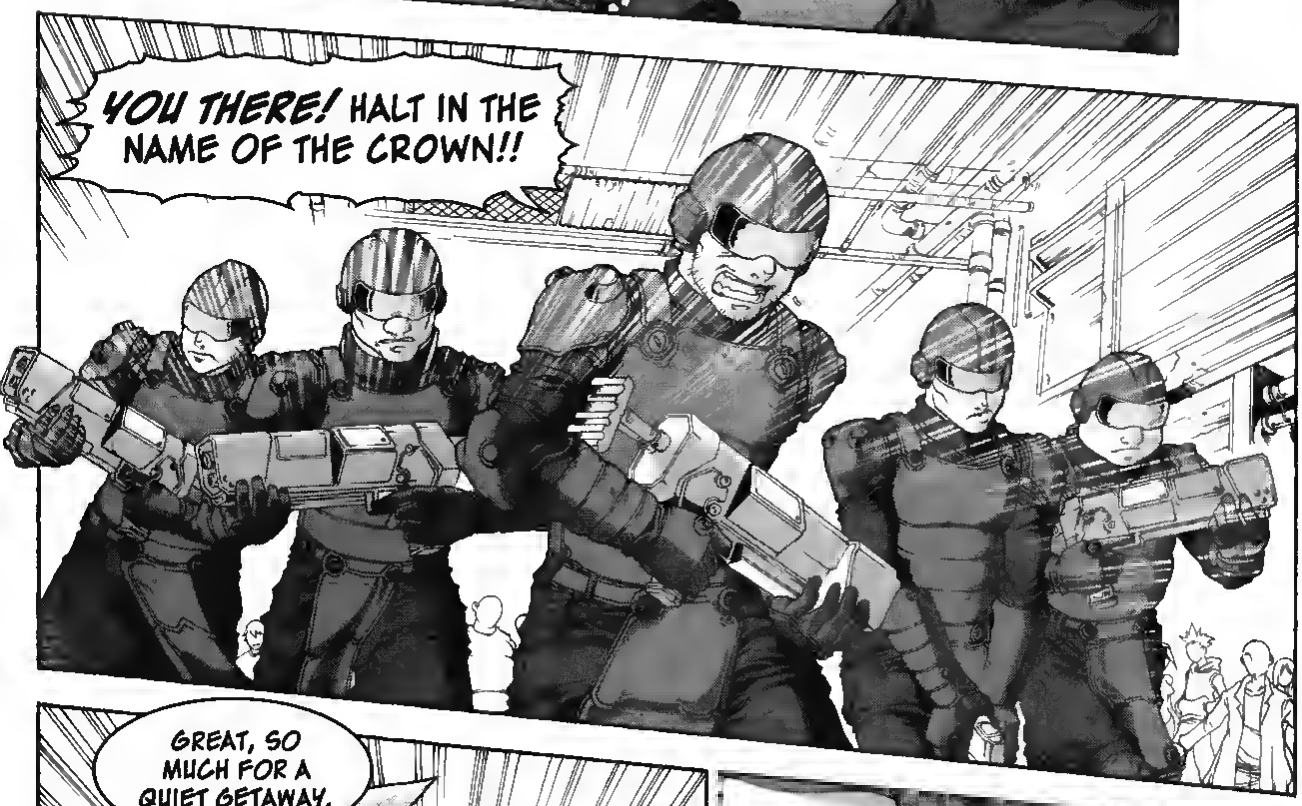
AND WHY IS THAT?

YOU WITH THE ROBOT! SECTOR PASS AND I.D. NOW!!
YOU'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT.
SURE THING, OFFICER.
NOT YOU!
THE WOMAN IN THE--
HGSSSSS
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO THEM?
IT'S A STASIS GENERATOR. IT SLOWS DOWN TIME.
PRETTY HANDY GADGET, IF YOU CAN AFFORD IT.

WE'VE ONLY GOT A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE BATTERY BURNS ITSELF OUT, SO I'LL MAKE THIS QUICK.
NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR INTRO--
WHO ARE YOU?
Abigail Chromantsky, AKA "Chrome Abbey." Prior convictions include gun smuggling, assaulting an officer, disorderly conduct and petty larceny.
Abigail Chromantsky
"Chrome Abbey"
Wanted for gun smuggling, assaulting an officer, disorderly conduct and petty larceny.
THANKS A LOT, RUSTBUCKET!
I REMEMBER YOU FROM THE BAR ON OZRIC PRIME. I HOPE YOU HAVE NOT FOLLOWED ME ALL THIS WAY LOOKING FOR A REMATCH.
NO, EVEN I'M NOT THAT DENSE. I KNOW YOU'RE A TANTRIKA AND I KNOW YOU'RE WORKING FOR ZHUMAC AND THE CHIMERA CORP.
I WANT TO OFFER YOU MY SERVICES AS A GUIDE.
I HAVE A LOT OF UNDERWORLD CONTACTS THAT CAN HELP YOU FIND YOUR TARGETS.

I WANT YOU TO TEACH ME HOW TO FIGHT.
AND WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?
I AM NOT LOOKING FOR AN APPRENTICE. EVEN IF I WAS, YOU ARE HARDLY SOMEONE I WOULD ENTRUST WITH THE SACRED TEACHINGS OF MY PEOPLE.
AND AS FOR A GUIDE, I HAVE DONE QUITE WELL ON MY OWN.
MAYBE SO, BUT HOW FAR DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GET WITHOUT A SHIP?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I HACKED THE STATION'S SECURITY GRID WHEN I GOT HERE.
YOUR SHIP'S BEEN IMPOUNDED AND THERE'S A STANDING ORDER TO DETAIN ANYONE THAT MATCHES YOUR GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

FOR WHAT REASON?!
I WAS HOPING YOU COULD TELL ME.


YOU THERE! HALT IN THE NAME OF THE CROWN!!

GREAT, SO MUCH FOR A QUIET GETAWAY.

NO GUNS.
IF WE ARE GOING TO ESCAPE THIS STATION, WE WILL DO IT WITHOUT KILLING ANYONE.

LEAVE THESE MEN TO ME.
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
RUSTLE
I SURRENDER.
KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM!!

TELL YOUR FRIEND TO DROP HER WEAPON AND PUT HER HANDS UP, NOW!!
YOU NEED NOT WORRY YOURSELF ABOUT HER.
I'LL DECIDE WHO TO WORRY-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
MERELY SHOWING YOU THAT I AM UNARMED.
AT LEAST IN THE CONVENTIONAL SENSE.
FWOOM

FWIP
SNAG
THWACK
Holy crap!
TAKE HER DOWN!
I APOLOGIZE FOR WHAT I AM ABOUT TO DO, BUT YOU LEAVE ME NO OTHER CHOICE.

WHACK
WHOOOSH
BANK

FWOOOOOOSH
WHAP
SHOOM
SCHLUCK
CRASH

KOOM
FOR CROWN'S SAKE! SHE'S JUST ONE WOMAN! BLAST HER!!
FWOOM
KA-BAM
KA-BAM

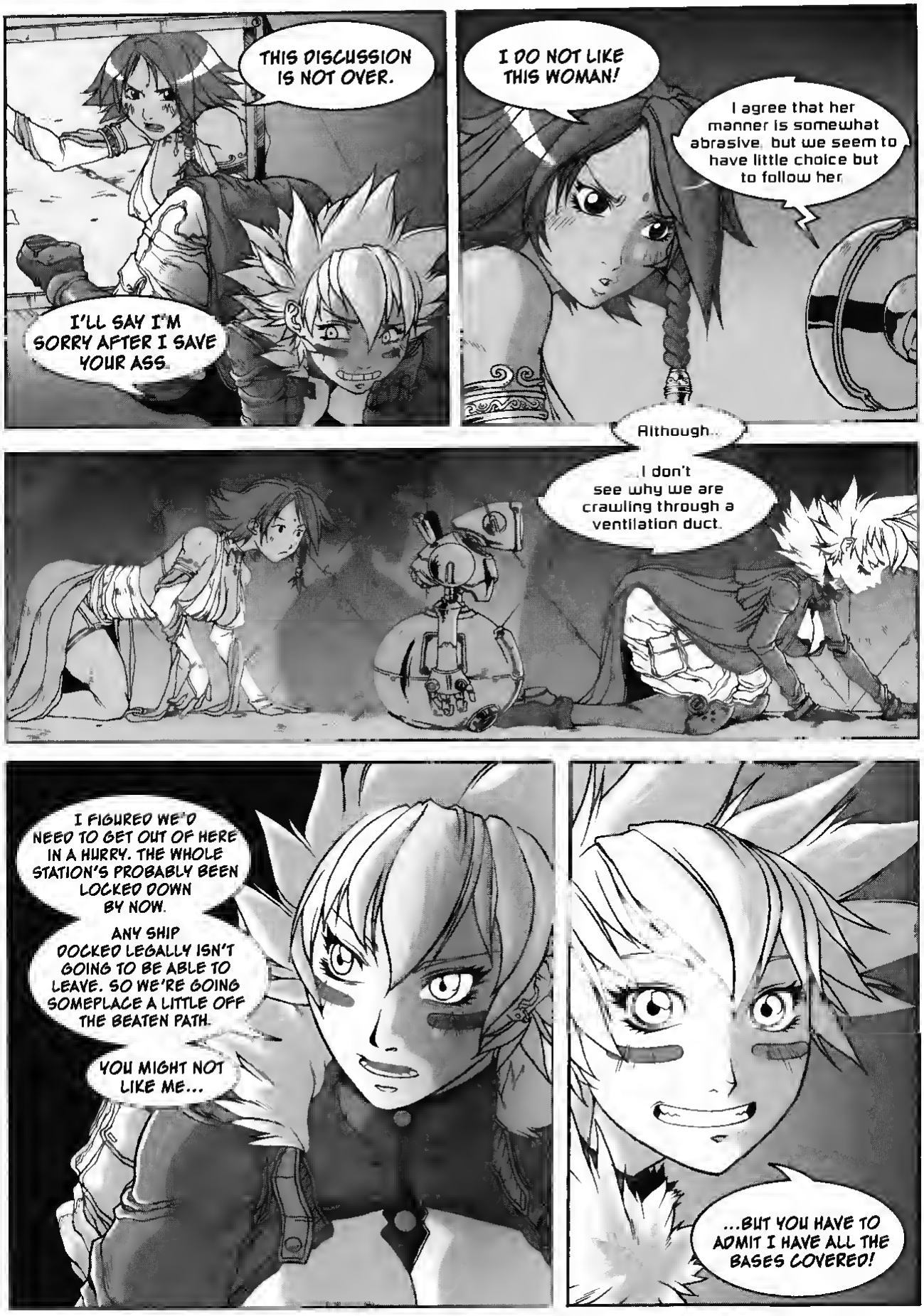
BAM
THOOOM
SCHUK

HOW THE HELL DOES SHE DO THAT?!
Years of practice, I believe.
YOU DO KNOW WHAT A RHETORICAL QUESTION IS, DON'T YOU?
YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT A SHIP?

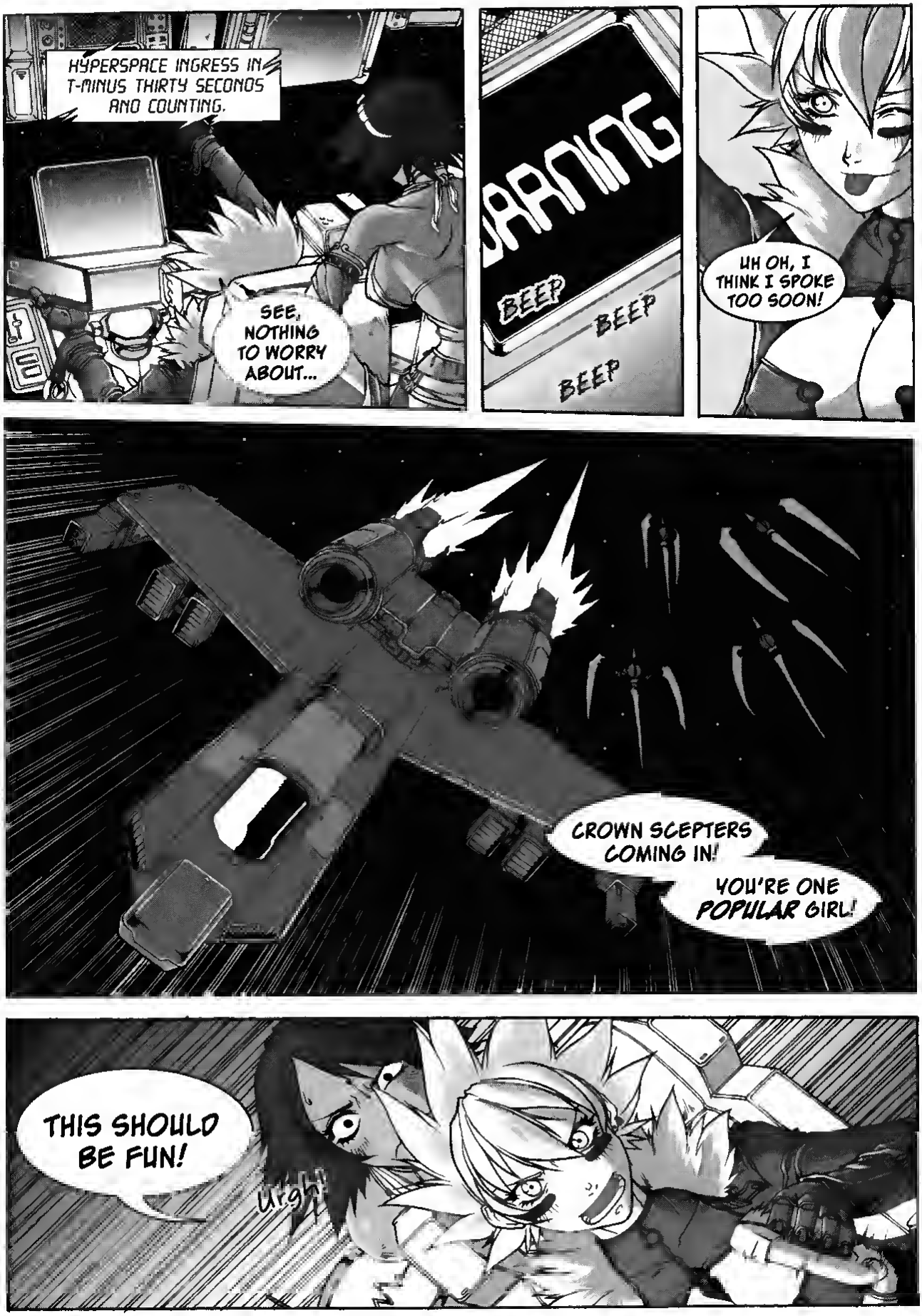
...
THAT MEAN WE GOT A DEAL?
THAT WE CAN DISCUSS ONCE WE ARE OFF THIS STATION.
RIGHT. HOLD THAT THOUGHT!
ABIGAIL!! WAIT!

BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

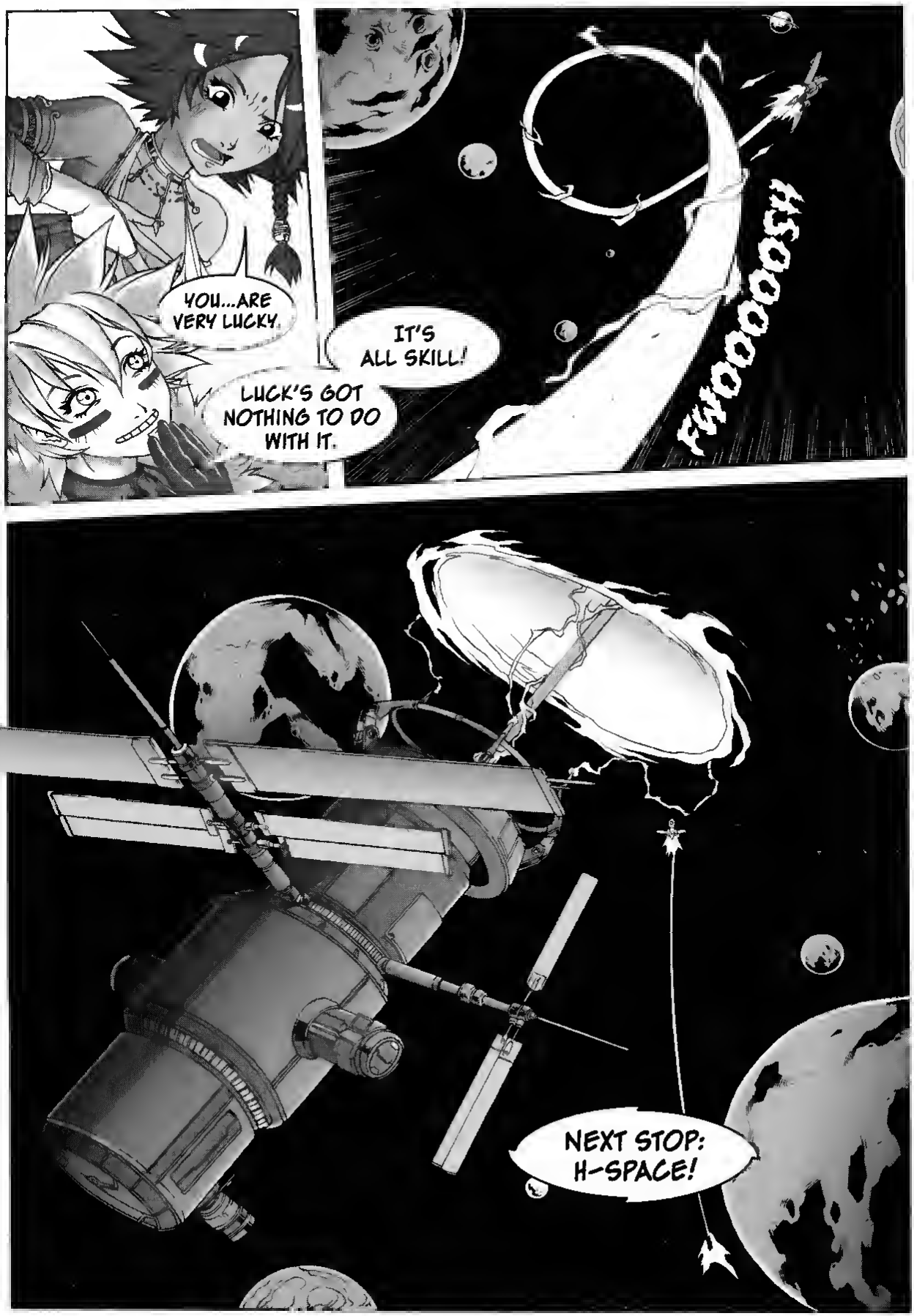
SEE? NO WORRIES.
Agh...!
Ungh!
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU NOT TO SHOOT ANYONE!
YOU SAID NOT TO KILL ANYONE. YOU NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT SHOOTING. BESIDES...
...THEY'LL LIVE!
Guhhh...
I DON'T FIND YOUR DELIBERATE MISINTERPRETATION OF MY WORDS AMUSING.
OF COURSE YOU DON'T. BUT SINCE YOU HAVEN'T AGREED TO BE MY TEACHER, YOU'RE JUST A PASSENGER AND YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO BOSS ME AROUND.
NOW, DO YOU WANT TO KEEP LECTURING ME OR DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE?


THIS DISCUSSION IS NOT OVER.
I'LL SAY I'M SORRY AFTER I SAVE YOUR ASS.
I DO NOT LIKE THIS WOMAN!
I agree that her manner is somewhat abrasive, but we seem to have little choice but to follow her.
Although...
...I don't see why we are crawling through a ventilation duct.
I FIGURED WE'D NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE IN A HURRY. THE WHOLE STATION'S PROBABLY BEEN LOCKED DOWN BY NOW.
ANY SHIP DOCKED LEGALLY ISN'T GOING TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE. SO WE'RE GOING SOMEPLACE A LITTLE OFF THE BEATEN PATH.
YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE ME...
...BUT YOU HAVE TO ADMIT I HAVE ALL THE BASES COVERED!

HERE WE ARE.
WELCOME TO THE STILETTO.
STRAP YOURSELVES IN WHILE I FIRE HER UP.
WON'T THEY SIMPLY SHUT DOWN THE HYPERSPACE GATE TO PREVENT US FROM ESCAPING?
NAH, IT'D BE TOO EXPENSIVE. THE STATION IS CALIBRATED TO THE GATE'S OPTIMUM POINTS OF DESTINATION.
IF THEY SHUT IT DOWN NOW, IT'LL TAKE MONTHS TO GET IT BACK IN SYNC.


HYPERSPACE INGRESS IN T-MINUS THIRTY SECONDS AND COUNTING.
SEE, NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT...
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
UH OH, I THINK I SPOKE TOO SOON!
CROWN SCEPTERS COMING IN!
YOU'RE ONE POPULAR GIRL!
THIS SHOULD BE FUN!
Urgh!

LET'S SEE WHAT THESE BOYS ARE MADE OF!
SKREEEE
YOU ARE PLANNING ON RAMMING THEM?!
NOT IF THEY GET OUT OF THE WAY!
BREAK FORMATION! THAT PILOT'S INSANE!
HA! I KNEW THEY WOULDN'T HAVE THE STONES TO STAND THEIR GROUND!
I think I just blew a fuse!


YOU...ARE VERY LUCKY.
LUCK'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
IT'S ALL SKILL!
FWOOOOOSH
NEXT STOP: H-SPACE!

BY THE TIME THE CROWNIES GET A FIX ON US...WE'LL BE LOOONG GONE.
I CAN HARDLY SAY THAT I FEEL SAFE. YOUR RECKLESS BEHAVIOR PUT US ALL AT RISK.
IF THAT'S YOUR WAY OF SAYING *THANKS*, YOU NEED TO WORK ON YOUR SOCIAL SKILLS.
I AM GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP. IT IS YOUR METHODS THAT LEAVE SOMETHING TO BE DESIRED.
YEAH, WELL WHEN YOU FIGURE OUT WHAT THAT SOMETHING IS YOU LET ME KNOW, 'KAY?
...
SO, WHERE ARE WE HEADED?
TAKE US TO THE *CYGNUS SECTOR*. NEAR THE EDGE OF THE COLONIES.
YOU LOOKING FOR SOMETHING OUT THERE?
BEFORE YOU CAME ALONG, YES.
A MAN NAMED *BELANGER*.
CURSE BELANGER, THE SLAVER?!
YOU WERE GOING TO LOOK FOR HIM BY YOURSELF?!
AND YOU CALL *ME* RECKLESS...

Chapter Four
Adventures in the Skin Trade

charon jumpstaition
CHIEF, THERE IS AN INQUISITOR BRAILLE REQUESTING TO SPEAK WITH YOU.
TELL HIM HE'LL HAVE TO WAIT. I WANT TO TALK TO THE MEN WHO ARE STILL CONSCIOUS AND FIND OUT WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE.
UH, SIR...
ZZZZZZZ

THE INQUISITION WAITS FOR NO MAN.
THIS IS NOW A COG-SANCTIONED INVESTIGATION. I WILL BE THE ONE HANDLING THE DEBRIEFING OF YOUR MEN!
M-MY APOLOGIES, SIR...! I MEANT NO DISRESPECT!
OF COURSE NOT.
YOU DO NOT STRIKE ME AS A STUPID MAN.
AH, Y-YES SIR. I M-MEAN, NO SIR...
AH, THIS WAY, PLEASE.

THIS IS TROOPER ARGRIVES.
HE WAS ONE OF THE MEN WHO TRIED TO APPREHEND THE WOMAN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.
WHAT HAPPENED HERE? WAS IT THIS WOMAN WHO SHOT YOU IN THE LEG?
THERE WERE TWO WOMEN, SIR. ONE WAS HALF-NAKED AND IT LOOKED LIKE SHE HAD TAKEN OUT THE FIRST GROUP OF TROOPERS WITHOUT A SINGLE WEAPON.
THE OTHER WOMAN HAD A CYBERNETIC ARM. SHE WAS THE ONE WHO SHOT ME AND THE OTHERS IN THE LEG.
WHAT ABOUT SURVEILLANCE?
DO WE HAVE ANY USEFUL FOOTAGE OF THIS WOMAN OR HER ACCOMPLICE?
NO, SIR.
ONE OF THEM HACKED INTO OUR SECURITY NETWORK AND SHUT DOWN ALL OF THE INTERNAL CAMERAS ON THIS SIDE OF THE STATION.
I'M SURE TROOPER ARGRIVES CAN GIVE YOU A FULL DESCRIPTION, THOUGH.

I'M SURE HE CAN.
RELAX NOW, TROOPER. THIS WILL ONLY HURT IF YOU RESIST.
Y-YES, SIR...
LOOK DEEP INTO MY EYES AND PICTURE THE WOMEN WHO ATTACKED YOU...
WELL DONE, TROOPER. NOW TO YOUR REST...
AHHH...!

I HAVE AN IMAGE OF THE SUBJECTS.
BEEP
TWO WOMEN?! TWO WOMEN TOOK OUT NINE OF MY BEST MEN?! HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?!
OBVIOUSLY YOUR BEST MEN WERE NOT GOOD ENOUGH. THOUGH THESE ARE NO ORDINARY WOMEN... ESPECIALLY THE ONE WITH THE DARK HAIR.
WHO ARE THEY SIR, IF I MIGHT ASK?
NO, YOU MAY NOT ASK.
YOU AND YOUR MEN HAVE ALREADY FAILED IN THE SIMPLE TASK OF APPREHENDING THEM.
I WILL NOT BURDEN YOUR MINDS WITH FURTHER DETAILS THAT WOULD BE BEYOND YOUR LIMITED SCOPE OF UNDERSTANDING.
SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THEY ARE ENEMIES OF BOTH CHURCH AND STATE AND ARE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

IF YOU STILL WISH TO BE OF USE TO ME, YOU CAN UPLOAD THIS IMAGE TO THE STATION'S DATA BASE.
RETRIEVE ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN GATHER ABOUT EITHER OF THESE TWO WOMEN.
I MAY BE ABLE TO DO MORE THAN THAT, SIR.
EXPLAIN.
INDEED? THEN PERHAPS YOU ARE NOT AS INEPT AS I FIRST THOUGHT.
THERE ARE ONLY A LIMITED NUMBER OF EXITS CORRESPONDING TO THIS PARTICULAR JUMP GATE.
WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO TRACK THEIR SHIP'S ENERGY EMISSIONS AND TELL YOU EXACTLY WHAT SYSTEM THEY'RE HEADING TOWARD.
YES, SIR!
IF YOU CAN TRACK THESE TWO AS YOU SAY..
...YOU WILL HAVE GONE A LONG WAY TOWARDS REDEEMING YOURSELF AND YOUR MEN IN MY EYES. GO NOW. MAKE HASTE!
RUN WHILE YOU CAN, LITTLE TANTRIKA... YOUR DAY OF JUDGMENT IS COMING SOONER THAN YOU THINK!

HERE WE ARE, GUYS— CYGNUS 4. A PLANET SO CRAPPY, THEY DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER GIVING IT A NAME.
WHAT'S THE PLAN?
WHY ARE YOU IN SUCH A HURRY?
TRINA, WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!
SAYING THANK YOU.
MMPH!

Mmm...
Ms. Chromantsky?
Mm...
Mmm! Unnh...
Ms. Chromantsky...?
ABIGAIL!
WHA?! HUH?!
My apologies for such a rude awakening, but you were beginning to drool on yourself.
I MUST HAVE DOZED OFF. I WAS DREAMING ABOUT...
WHOA! NEVER MIND WHAT I WAS DREAMING ABOUT!

WHERE'S TRINA?
That is why I have been trying to wake you. She has been gone for four point three hours without contacting us.
I was beginning to worry that she may have gotten into trouble.
FOUR HOURS?! WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO ME?!
That was Trina's doing. She used a Tantrika technique called the Hand of Repose. It causes the subject to fall into a deep sleep.
I have seen her do it to someone once before. Quite an impressive skill if I do say so myself.
SHE KNOCKED ME OUT? WHY THE HELL WOULD SHE DO THAT?

I believe she has some ..trust issues where you are concerned
TRUST ISSUES? I SAVED HER DAMNED LIFE!
Be that as it may, she felt that it would be better to find Curse Belanger on her own.
IS SHE NUTS? SHE'S GOT NO IDEA WHAT SHE'S UP AGAINST!
If you define nuts as having overconfidence in one's skills, then I would have to say yes, she is indeed nuts.
But from what I have observed of her behavior, I would also say that she is suffering from survivor's guilt
Being the last of her people has taken a heavy toll on Trina. I believe she sometimes regrets that she did not die with them.
YOU CAN SAVE ALL THAT PSYCHO BABBLE CRAP FOR ANOTHER TIME, RUST BUCKET.
SURVIVOR'S GUILT OR NOT, IF WE DON'T FIND TRINA FAST...

..."SHE'S NOT GOING TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO HAVE REGRETS."
LISTEN UP, LADIES!
WE'RE ABOUT TO MAKE PLANET FALL. IF ANY OF YOU TRY TO RUN WHEN WE UNCUFF YOU AND LEAD YOU OUT OF THE SHIP...
...YOU'LL EXPERIENCE PAIN THAT'LL MAKE POPPIN' OUT A BRAT SEEM LIKE A BACK MASSAGE.
ZZZZZZZ
EVERYONE GET THE PICTURE?
GOOD. NOW MOVE!

DAMN, JONESY! IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU GOT HERE...
I WAS BEGINNIN' TA THINK YOU GOT CAUGHT BY THE CROWNIES.
LIGHTEN UP, SWEETHEART.
I MIGHT BE RUNNING A LITTLE LATE, BUT AFTER YOU SEE WHAT I BROUGHT,
YOU WON'T EVEN CARE.
TA-DA!

MY NAME IS TRINA DEVI AND THERE IS MUCH MORE TO ME THAN MEETS THE EYE.
ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE.
WOOSH
FWIP
NICE JOB, JONESY! WE MIGHT HAVE TO KEEP THIS ONE FOR OURSELVES.

MUCH MORE!
FWOOOOOSH
URRK!
WHAT THE...?!
PWIP
WHAP
SNAG
FWOOM
KOOM
KRONK
THWACK

I WARNED YOU WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU GOT OUT OF LINE!
URK!
KRACK
YAH!
THOOSH
OOF!
SHOOM
SLAM

Clap Clap
VERY IMPRESSIVE.
THE LAST TIME I SAW A STRIPFIGHTER IN ACTION, I PUT FIVE LAS BOLTS INTO HER.
THAT WAS MY SISTER, YOU SCUM!
AWW, MY HEART BLEEDS...
IF I HAVE MY WAY, YOUR HEART WILL NOT BE THE ONLY THING THAT BLEEDS!
BEFORE WE END THIS, I MUST KNOW WHY. WHY ATTACK A PEACEFUL PLANET AND SLAUGHTER ALL OF ITS PEOPLE?!
NOTHING PERSONAL, HONEY. A GUY NAMED BRAILLE CONTACTED ME AND A FEW OTHER RUNNER CAPTAINS.
HE OFFERED US A CHANCE TO RAID YOUR LITTLE PLANET WITHOUT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT THE CROWNIES INTERFERING.

THE ONLY HITCH WAS WE HAD TA MAKE SURE NOBODY GOT OFF THE PLANET ALIVE.
GUESS WE WEREN'T AS THOROUGH AS WE SHOULDA BEEN.
BUT THAT'S SOMETHING I CAN FIX RIGHT NOW.
AAAHHH!!!
ZZZZT
ZZZZT
ZZZZT
THROW HER IN ONE OF THE HOLDING CELLS.
ME AND JONES ARE GOING TO SPEND SOME QUALITY TIME WITH THIS ONE ONCE SHE COMES TO.

Chapter Five
Lost and Found

Ms. Chromantsky, I still do not understand how you intend to find Trina.
THE SAME WAY I FOUND HER ON THE CHARON JUMPSTATION. I TRACKED HER DNA.
WHEN SHE DID THAT PALM THING TO ME ON OZRIC, SHE LEFT BEHIND ENOUGH RESIDUAL DNA TO ALLOW ME TO TRACK HER.
BAR
AND SINCE SHE PRETTY MUCH ANNOUNCED SHE WAS WORKING FOR THE CHIMERA CORP. IT DIDN'T TAKE TOO LONG TO FIGURE OUT WHERE SHE WAS GOING.

AH, HERE WE GO.
I FOUND SOMETHING. IT CAN'T BE MORE THEN A FEW HOURS OLD, EITHER.
HOLD THIS. I WANT TO HAVE A LITTLE WORD WITH THE LOCALS.
ONE OF THEM HAS TO HAVE SEEN TRINA.
The inhabitants of outer planets like this one are a notoriously tight-lipped people.
What makes you think that they will talk to you?
I CAN BE PRETTY PERSUASIVE.
GLINT

BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
TRIGGER HAPPY NUT JOB!!
CRAZY MANIAC!!
HURRRAAAGH
Ms. Chromantsky...is everything okay?

SURE, NO SWEAT.
I WAS JUST BEING PERSUASIVE.
NOW, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT MY FRIEND WHO CAME IN HERE EARLIER...?
TWWRL
YA THINK YOU'RE SCARIN' ME WITH YOUR LOUD MOUTH AND FANCY PISTOL?! ALL YOU'RE DOING IS MAKING YERSELF LOOK STUPID AND RUINING MY BUSINESS!

RUINING YOUR BUSINESS, HUH? IT'S FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT...
...BECAUSE I WAS THINKING HOW IT'S GOT TO BE PRETTY HARD TO GET BOOZE WAY OUT HERE IN THE FRINGES.
Pretty expensive, too.
SCHUK
BANG
BANG
BANG
OH CRAP!!
NOT MY HOOCH!!
ALRIGHT!! ALRIGHT, YOU WIN!
I SAW YOUR FRIEND. SHE CAME IN LOOKING FOR WORK AS A DANCER.
ONE OF CURSE'S GIRLS FED HER SOME LINE ABOUT BEING ABLE TO HOOK HER UP WITH A JOB.
THEY LEFT A COUPLE OF HOURS AGO...

WHERE DID SHE TAKE HER?
HOLD ON!!
I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING! JUST DON'T SHOOT ANY MORE OF MY STOCK!
AND YOU SAID THESE PEOPLE WERE TIGHT-LIPPED.
I'M FULL OF SURPRISES.
I must admit, I never thought you would persuade anyone to talk by threatening their alcohol reserves.
THERE'S A SET OF MOUNTAIN RANGES ON THE NORTHWESTERN CONTINENT OF CYGNUS' THIRD MOON THAT HOUSE A BUNCH OF OLD CAVES.
BELAHGER AND HIS GIRLS ARE HOLED UP THERE, BUT IF ANYBODY ASKS...YOU DIDN'T HEAR THAT FROM ME.
THANKS, BARKEEP!
YOU'VE BEEN A REAL BIG HELP.
SORRY FOR THE MESS.
COME ON, BONDS... WE'VE GOT A BREAKOUT TO PLAN!

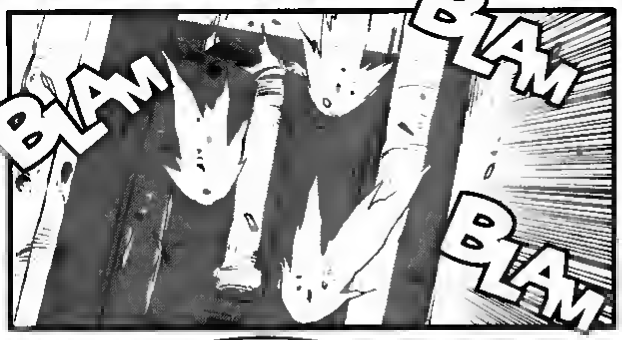
HEY, JONSEY.
IS THE TRANSPORT SHIP READY YET?
JUST ABOUT. WE GOT A FEW LAST MINUTE CHECKS TO RUN AND THEN WE'LL START LOADING THE WOMEN ABOARD.
KA-BOOM
WHAT THE--?!

JONES-- REPORT! WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!
WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! ONE OF THE TRANSPORT SHIPS JUST EXPLODED AND--
KA-BOOM
DAMNATION!
IS IT THE CROWN?! DID THEY FIND US?
I CAN'T TELL! THERE'S TOO MUCH SMOKE! THE GIRLS ARE STARTING TO PANIC!
SET UP A DEFENSIVE PARAMETER AND KEEP EVERYONE CALM! I'LL BE TOPSIDE IN A FEW MINUTES!
YOU COME WITH ME. I WANT TO CHECK ON OUR NEW PRISONER.
IF THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH HER...

Psst!
TAP
WHAM!

SORRY IF I INTERRUPTED YOUR NAP. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE.
I WAS NOT SLEEPING.
I WAS MEDITATING TO HEAL MY WOUNDS.

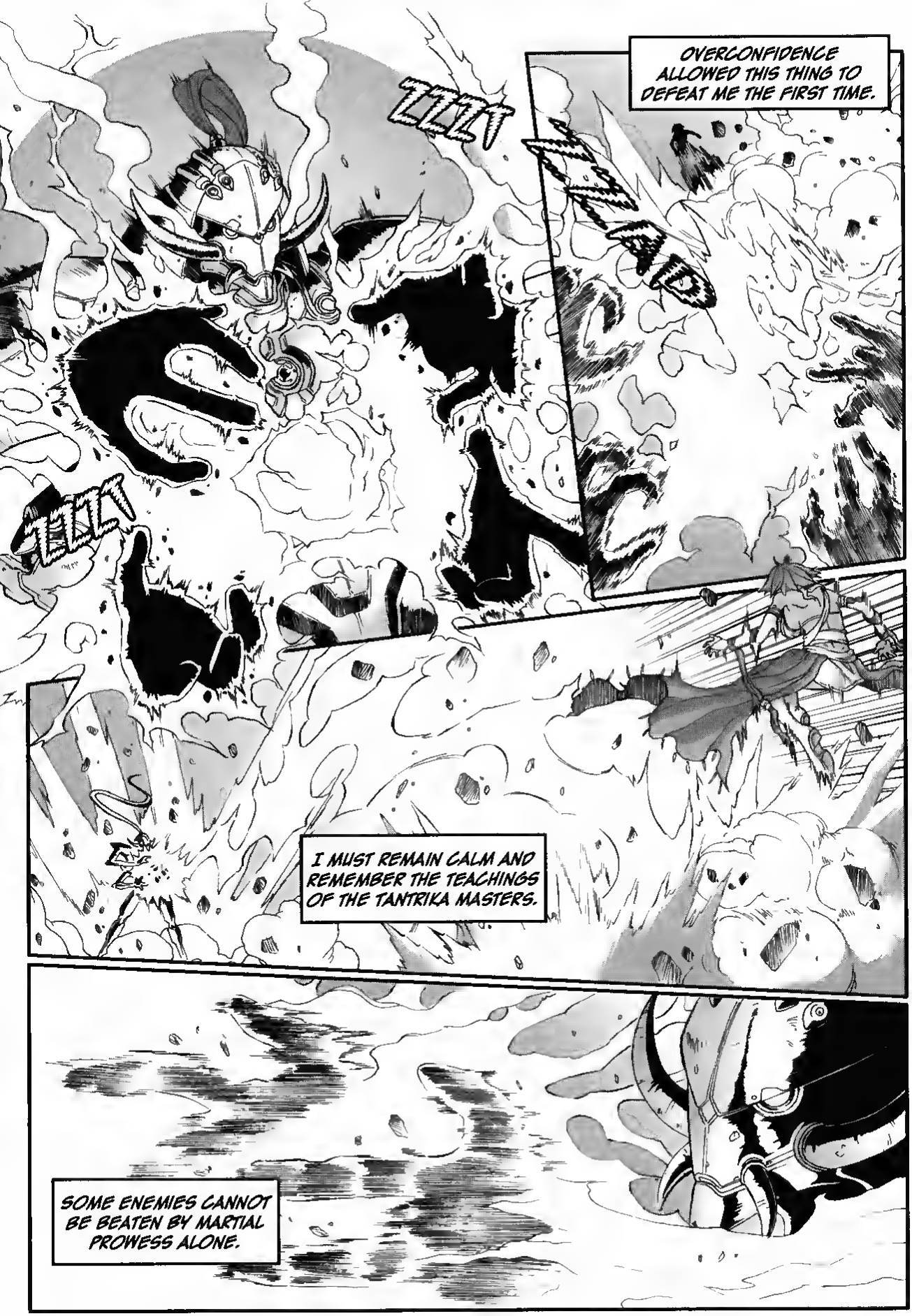
WOUNDS YOU WOULDN'T HAVE IF YOU'D JUST WAITED FOR ME.
THIS IS TWICE I'VE SAVED YOUR ASS IN ONE DAY...IN CASE YOU'RE KEEPING TRACK.


BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

I OO OWE YOU AN APOLOGY, ABIGAIL. I SHOULD HAVE NEVER HAVE LEFT YOU BEHIND THE WAY I DID.
SAVE IT, TRINA. WE'VE GOTTA GET GOING.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE BELANGER'S BIMBOS FIGURE OUT THE EXPLOSIVES I PLACED WERE JUST A DISTRACTION.

IT'S A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT, SWEETHEART!
DROP YOUR WEAPONS AND GET BACK IN THAT CAGE...
BEFORE I LET MY MECHANICAL FRIEND HAVE HIS WAY WITH YOU.

ONCE AGAIN THE COWARD HIDES BEHIND HIS MACHINES.
UH, TRINA...HE HAS A COMBAT MEK. MAYBE WE SHOULD BE NICE TO HIM.
JUST MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T ESCAPE AND ALERT THE OTHERS!
I WILL HANDLE THE MEK.
AND REMEMBER-- WE NEED HIM ALIVE!
YEAH, GOOD LUCK WITH THAT!
KRACKA BOOM
TK
TK
TK
YOU KNOW, THIS THING YOU HAVE AGAINST KILLING IS REALLY STARTING TO GET ANNOYING!!


OVERCONFIDENCE ALLOWED THIS THING TO DEFEAT ME THE FIRST TIME.
I MUST REMAIN CALM AND REMEMBER THE TEACHINGS OF THE TANTRIKA MASTERS.
SOME ENEMIES CANNOT BE BEATEN BY MARTIAL PROWESS ALONE.

FOR THIS OPPONENT I WILL NEED TO TAP INTO THE DIVINE SPARK THAT COURSES THROUGH ALL THINGS.
MANIPULATE IT...
SLICE
...AND BEND IT TO MY WILL.
NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL. SENTIENT OR INERT. ALL THINGS RELY ON THE DIVINE SPARK TO EXIST AND FUNCTION.
ONE HAS ONLY TO DISRUPT THE FLOW...
ZANG
MY TURN!

...AND EVEN THE MOST UNSTOPPABLE FOE...
CLANG
...CAN BE BROUGHT TO THEIR KNEES.
SLAM

SLICE
HUH!
PWAANG
YAH!
FOOM
HAH!

BAM
SHOOM
HURRK...!
KRAAK
KOOM
SHFF

THE MEK IS DOWN, ABIGAIL! HOW GOES IT WITH BELANGER?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME! I GOT IT COVERED!
BANG
BANG
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO DO BETTER THEN THAT IF YOU THINK YOU CAN TAKE ME OUT!!
YOUR AIM SUCKS!

MAYBE... OR MAYBE I WASN'T AIMING AT YOU!
CRUMBLE
WHAT?!
UAAAGH!!!
THOOOM

UNORTHODOX, BUT EFFECTIVE AS USUAL, ABIGAIL.
NORMALLY, I WOULD FEEL OBLIGATED TO REPRIMAND YOU FOR YOUR CHOICE OF TACTICS...
FORTUNATELY, WHEN IT COMES TO THIS FUGITIVE, I AM NOT OVERLY CONCERNED WITH HIS WELL-BEING.
SCUM! TELL ME ALL YOU KNOW ABOUT THE ATTACK ON RAMA AND WHO ORCHESTRATED IT!
OR I WILL LEAVE YOU HERE TO ROT!
HAVE IT YOUR WAY, THEN.
I AM SURE THE WOMEN WHO YOU WERE ABOUT TO ENSLAVE WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO HELP DIG YOU OUT.
GET BENT!
I'M NOT SAYIN' ANYTHING!

GULP!
HEY! YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE WITH THEM!
THEY'LL TEAR ME APART!
I AM SURE THEY WOULD...AND RIGHTFULLY SO!
TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW AND YOU HAVE MY WORD THAT NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO YOU.
CURSE! YOU LITTLE WEASEL!! KEEP YOUR DAMN MOUTH SHUT!

WHY IS IT EVERY TIME YOU GET INTO TROUBLE I'M THE ONE WHO BAILS YOU OUT?
YOU'RE LUCKY YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD LAY OR I WOULD'VE LEFT YOU ON YOUR OWN A LONG TIME AGO!
I OWE LITTLE MISS TRINA SOME PAYBACK FOR THE CHEAP SHOT TO THE FACE. AND YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY-- PAYBACK'S A BITCH.
AND ME...I'M QUEEN OF THE BITCHES.

Chapter Six
Dance Of The Lethal Ladies

IF YOU HURT ONE HAIR ON MY DIPSHIT CURSE'S HEAD, I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU WISH YOU WERE DEAD!
UGH, SHE'S WITH BELANGER?!
AND I THOUGHT I HAD BAD TASTE IN MEN...
WE'LL SEE HOW MANY WISECRACKS YOU COME UP WITH AFTER I WIPE THE FLOOR WITH YOU!
TAKE THEM OUT NOW!

LOOKS LIKE I HIT A NERVE!
Yeah, yeah, I hear you
NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR JOKES! YOU MUST FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND!
GHYAAARGH

NOTHING BEATS A LITTLE GIRL-ON-GIRL ACTION!
YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED OUT OF THIS!
WHERE'S THE FUN IN THAT?
CRACK
LIGHTS OUT!
FWUMP
UUH!!

YOUR ASS IS MINE!
KRAKLE
SNAP
FWIIWSSH
SCHLUCK
YOU'RE GONNA NEED A BIGGER STICK THERE, BUTCH!
THIS ISN'T JUST A STICK, YOU BLEACH-BLONDE IDIOT!
AHHH!!
IT'S A SHOCK STAFF!

ABBEY!
SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR LITTLE PLAYMATE!
KEEP AWAY FROM HER!!
OH, YEAH? WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO IF I DON'T?

I WILL MAKE YOU REGRET IT!
THWACK
GAHH!!
HAH!
FWIP
TINK
ABIGAIL, ARE YOU HURT?!
O-DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME...
JUST DO YOUR THING AND GET US OUT OF THIS M-MESS...

PHEEEWW
TWIRL
OOF!
OOH!
POKE
POKE
AHHH!!
AHHH!!

THIS WHOLE OPERATION IS GOING STRAIGHT TO HELL... COVER ME WHILE I GET CURSE OUT OF HERE.
NICE TO SEE YOU TOO, SWEET CHEEKS.
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?!
THINGS HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF CONTROL. WE NEED TO LEAVE NOW!
NO ONE IS GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL I GET SOME ANSWERS--LEAST OF ALL THE TWO OF YOU!!

KEEP HER BUSY!
HAH!
YOINK
THWIP
THWIP
FWIP
FWIP

WHAP
SNAP
POP
ZAP
AHHH!
AHHH!
BZZZZZ
YOU AND CURSE HAVE HIDDEN BEHIND YOUR GUARDS LONG ENOUGH, JONES!
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER...THIS ENDS NOW!

YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME?! COME AND GET IT!!
NOBODY HURTS MY MAN AND GETS AWAY WITH IT!
WHOOOSH
WHAM
EYAAGH!

I'M S-SORRY, CURSE... SHE'S TOO FAST... I C-COULDN'T...
Hnh... Hnh...
IT'S OKAY, JONSEY. I'M HERE.
HOW TOUCHING. IT IS A SAD STATEMENT ABOUT THE UNIVERSE...
...WHEN EVEN A MURDERER CAN FIND LOVE.
YOU LEAVE HER ALONE!!
SHE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE ATTACK ON RAMA!!
I AM AWARE OF THAT, BELANGER. BUT HER INNOCENCE WILL NOT HELP HER...
...IF YOU DO NOT TELL ME WHAT I WISH TO KNOW!
THWACK

CLACK
CLACK
TAP
HER FATE IS ENTIRELY UP TO YOU.
FWOOM
AAAAHHH!!
WHAT DID YOU DO TO HER?!
I HAVE DISRUPTED THE CHAKRA THAT REGULATES HER BODY TEMPERATURE.
IF YOU DO NOT TELL ME WHAT I WISH TO KNOW, HER BODY WILL OVERHEAT AND SHE WILL EXIT THIS LIFE IN A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF PAIN... JUST AS MY SISTER DID.
YOU HAVE ABOUT ONE MINUTE TO TALK.
Y-YOU'RE BLUFFING! I...I KNOW TANTRIKAS DON'T KILL!
50 SECONDS...

TRINA... NO!
ABIGAIL, STAY THERE. THIS IS BETWEEN ME AND BELANGER.
SO THIS IS THE TANTRIKA WAY I THOUGHT WAS WORTH LEARNING, HUH?!
IS THIS ONE OF THOSE DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO MOMENTS?!
THIS SLIME MURDERED MY SISTER. I WANT HIM TO KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO WATCH SOMEONE HE LOVES DIE BEFORE HIS EYES.
HE STILL HAS A CHANCE TO SAVE HER, WHICH IS MORE THAN TIRZAH EVER HAD.
YOU THINK THAT'S SOMETHING YOUR TIRZAH WOULD HAVE WANTED?
TRINA...
SHE...!
I-I...
NO.

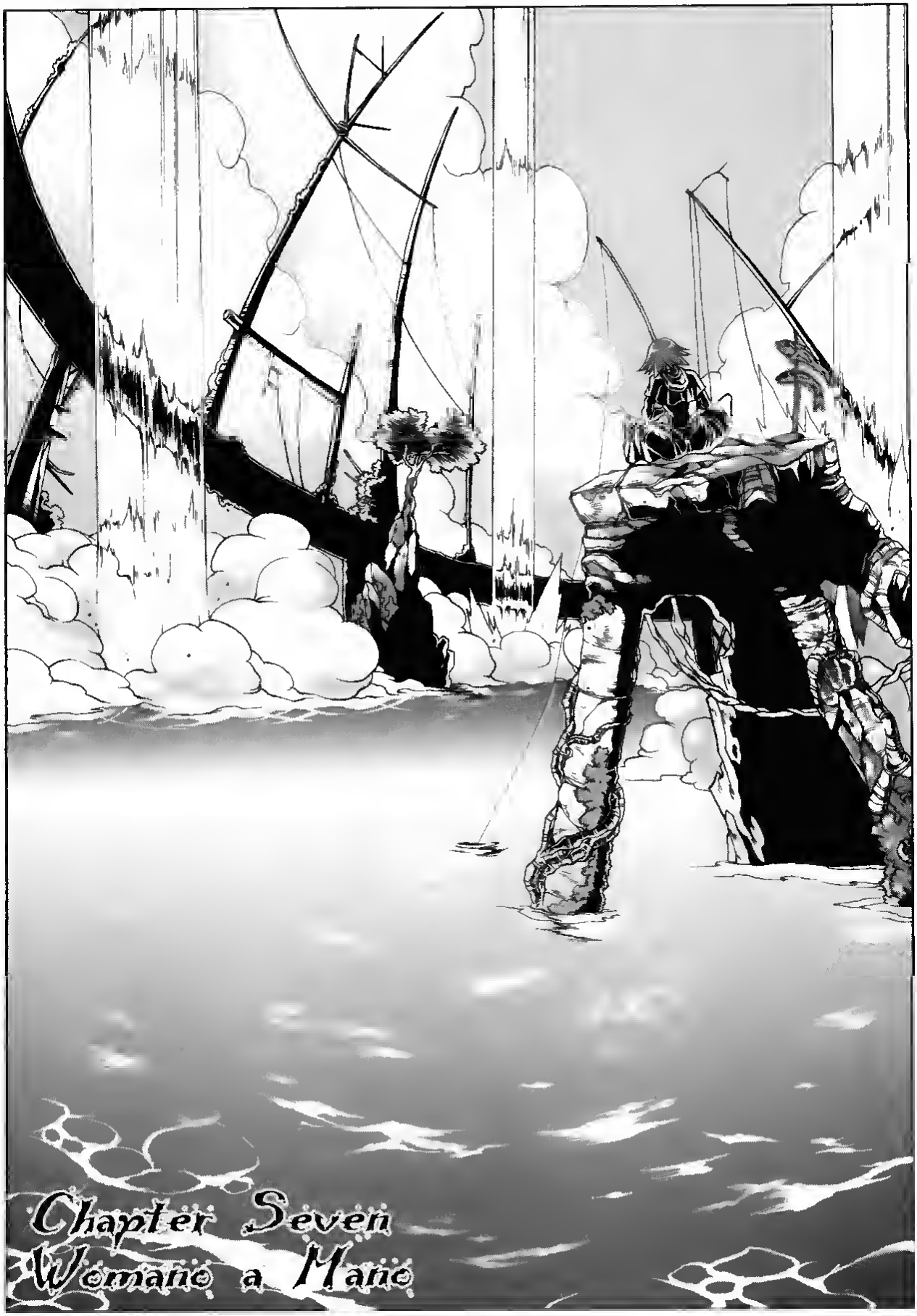
PWOK
I HAVE LOST MY WAY...!
IT'S OKAY, TRINA. YOU LET YOUR ANGER GET TO YOU. IT HAPPENS TO THE BEST OF US.
I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE.
YOU ARE RIGHT, ABIGAIL.
TIRZAH WOULD NEVER CONDONE AN EYE FOR AN EYE...
LISTEN UP, CURSE! YOU SEEM LIKE A SOMEWHAT INTELLIGENT GUY.
TELL TRINA WHAT SHE WANTS TO KNOW AND YOU AND YOUR GIRL CAN RELAX TOGETHER IN A NICE JAIL CELL, COMPLIMENTS OF THE CHIMERA CORPORATION.
BOUNTY HUNTERS TRYIN' TO FIND INFORMATION ON THE ATTACK ON RAMA?
YOU'RE DUMBER THAN I THOUGHT.
IF YOU HAND ME OVER TO THE CROWN, YOU'LL BE HELPING THEM FINISH WHAT THEY STARTED WITH THE RAID ON YOUR PLANET.
WHAT ARE YOU IMPLYING?!

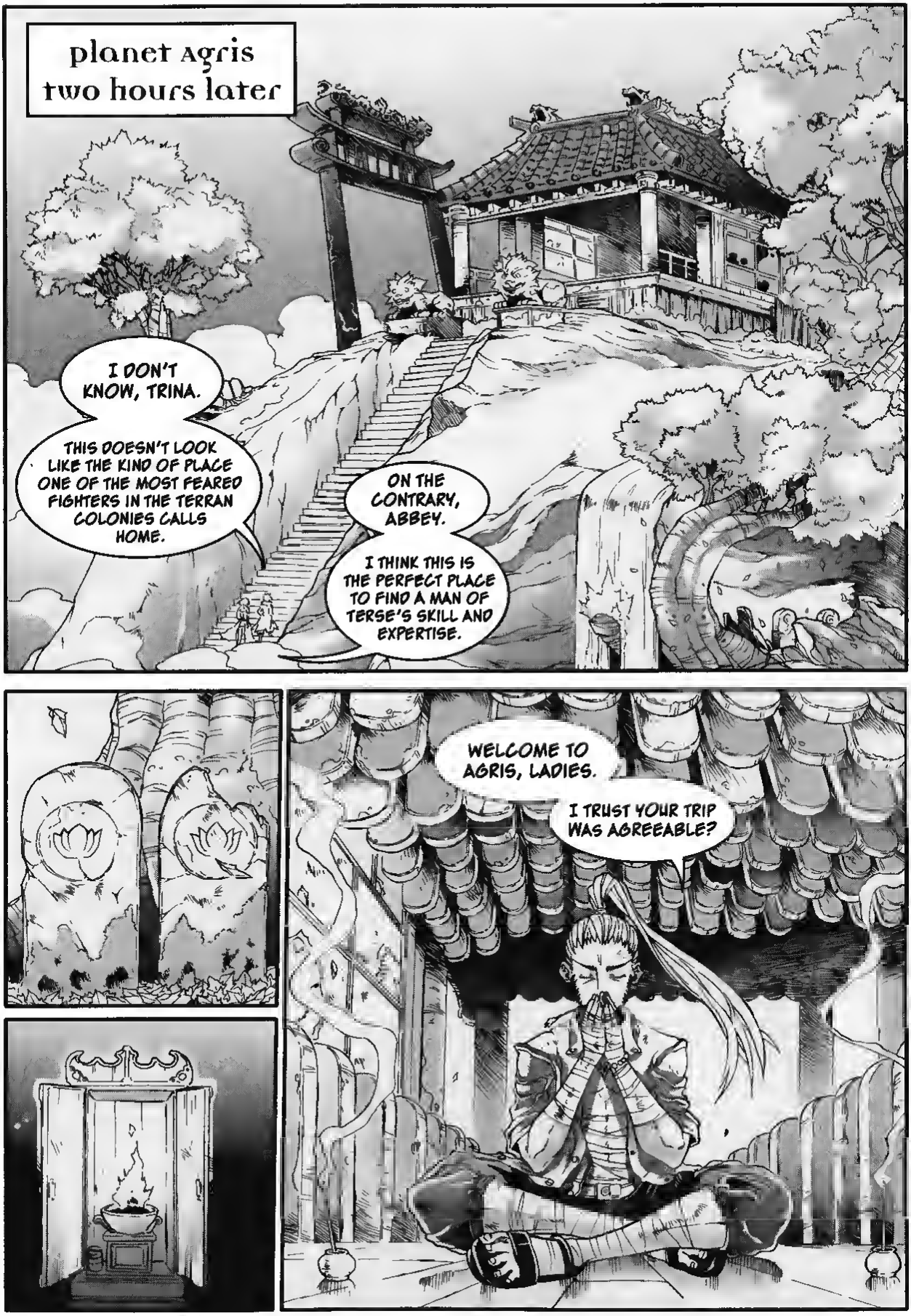
DAMN, YOU'RE ONE THICK-HEADED BROAD!
DO YOU REALLY THINK ONE GROUP OF RUNNERS COULD TAKE OUT AN ENTIRE PLANET?
THE CROWN AND THE COG WERE BOTH IN ON THIS FROM THE START.
GIVE IT A REST, CURSE. YOU'D SAY ANYTHING TO AVOID GOING BACK TO JAIL.
BUT THAT WOULD EXPLAIN A GREAT MANY THINGS, INCLUDING WHY THE CROWN SOLDIERS ATTACKED US ON THE CHARON JUMPSTATION.
I'M TELLING YOU THE TRUTH. I'M ONE OF LAST RUNNERS ALIVE WHO KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT THE RAID.
YOU GIVE ME UP TO THE CROWN AND WORD WILL NEVER GET OUT ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.
I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE PROOF OF THE CROWN'S AND THE COG'S INVOLVEMENT?
WE DON'T, BUT I KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES. THE LEGION, ARIC TERSE...HE'S IN THE ALTER SYSTEM ON A PLANET CALLED AGRIS.
TERSE WAS YOUR ALLY. WHY WOULD YOU TELL ME HIS LOCATION?
I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO JAIL. I FIGURE IF YOU SEE I'M TELLING THE TRUTH YOU'LL LET ME AND CURSE GO.
I'M WARNING YOU, THOUGH. LEGION ISN'T GOING TO GIVE UP THE INFO WITHOUT A FIGHT.
WE SHALL SEE ABOUT THAT...

Welcome back, ladies. I was beginning to worry.
I am pleased you have returned unharmed and with Curse Belanger in custody. Will we be contacting Chief Zhumac for pickup?
BELANGER'S FATE WILL BE DECIDED BY THE TRUST OF HIS INFORMATION.
I TOLD YOU, IT'S TRUE! OR ARE YOU HOLDING OUT THE HOPE YOU'LL GET TO TORTURE ME?!
What does he mean?
NOTHING, BONDS. LOCK THEM UP. I NEED TO FOCUS.

ARE YOU GOING TO BE OKAY?
I CAME CLOSE TO BREAKING ONE OF THE TANTRIKA'S MOST SACRED VOWS.
IN MY QUEST FOR ANSWERS, I LET MY ANGER TAKE CONTROL OF ME AND NEARLY KILLED A DEFENSELESS WOMAN.
LOOK, TRINA. FOR ALL OF YOUR SKILLS, YOU'RE STILL JUST A HUMAN BEING.
YOU WATCHED YOUR PLANET AND EVERYONE YOU CARED ABOUT DIE.
THAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE SCARS PEOPLE FOR LIFE.
SO YOU SLIPPED UP ONCE AND LOST YOUR TEMPER. CURSE DID KILL YOUR SISTER!
ANYONE ELSE WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING...AND I DOUBT THEY WOULD HAVE HAD ENOUGH SELF-CONTROL TO STOP.
WHAT IF IT HAPPENS AGAIN? THE FIGHT WITH CURSE BROUGHT OUT A SIDE OF ME I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
IT FRIGHTENS ME TO THINK ABOUT WHAT I MIGHT HAVE DONE.
HEY, THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR! I'LL KEEP YOU ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW.
THANK YOU, ABIGAIL. YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF TO BE A TRUE FRIEND.

I'M GLAD YOU'RE FINALLY STARTING TO REALIZE THAT.
FOR NOW, LET'S PUT THIS MELODRAMA BEHIND US, OKAY?
WE'VE GOT ANOTHER FUGITIVE TO CATCH.
OF COURSE, YOU ARE RIGHT.
WE HAVE TO FOCUS ON THE TASK AHEAD OF US AND NOT DWELL ON THE PAST.
THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT. I'M LAYING IN A COURSE NOW.
NEXT STOP-- PLANET AGRIS.
SO WHO DO YOU THINK THIS "BRAILLE" GUY IS AND WHY DOES HE HAVE SUCH A HATE FOR YOUR PEOPLE?
I DO NOT KNOW. I AM HOPEFUL THAT WHEN WE FIND ARIC TERSE WE WILL GET THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION.
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE WILL SOON FIND OUT....


Chapter Seven
Womano a Mano


planet agris
two hours later
I DON'T KNOW, TRINA.
THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE KIND OF PLACE ONE OF THE MOST FEARED FIGHTERS IN THE TERRAN COLONIES CALLS HOME.
ON THE CONTRARY, ABBEY.
I THINK THIS IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO FIND A MAN OF TERSE'S SKILL AND EXPERTISE.
WELCOME TO AGRIS, LADIES.
I TRUST YOUR TRIP WAS AGREEABLE?

I DO NOT GET MANY GUESTS. SO TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY HUMBLE ABODE?
I AM FAMILIAR WITH THIS TYPE OF SHRINE, BUT I WONDER...
IS THIS A TRULY A SHRINE... OR A TROPHY ROOM?
A LITTLE OF BOTH, ACTUALLY.
THESE MARKERS REPRESENT EVERY MAN OR WOMAN I HAVE EVER KILLED IN COMBAT. IT IS A TRIBUTE TO THEM AND TO THEIR FIGHTING SPIRIT.
A VAIN TRIBUTE AT BEST AND QUITE MORBID.
I'LL SAY! WHAT A SICKO!
I HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF WORSE THINGS THAN VANITY, DEAR LADY.
JUDGING BY YOUR ATTIRE, I WOULD SAY YOU KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT THE MARTIAL WAY.
YOU ARE A TANTRIKA, AFTER ALL.

YOUR OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS ARE IMPRESSIVE.
AS IS THE FACT OF YOUR SURVIVAL.
YOU MUST BE HIGHLY SKILLED TO HAVE LIVED THROUGH THE ATTACK ON YOUR HOME WORLD AND REMAIN UNDETECTED ALL THESE YEARS.
SAVE YOUR PRAISE FOR ONE WHO SEEKS IT.
I WAS SENT HERE BY CURSE BELANGER. HE SAID YOU HAD PROOF OF THE CROWN AND COG'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ATTACK.
IF YOU DO HAVE IT... I WANT YOU TO GIVE IT TO ME *NOW.*
YOU LOST ANY RIGHT TO CIVILITY THE MOMENT YOU TOOK PART IN THE *EXTERMINATION* OF MY PEOPLE.
DO YOU HAVE THE PROOF BELANGER SPOKE OF OR NOT?
I DO INDEED.
I HAVE HERE A DATA STICK WITH ENOUGH INFORMATION TO PROVE THE COG AND CROWN'S INVOLVEMENT AND MUCH MORE...
...BUT IT COMES AT A PRICE. IF YOU WANT IT, YOU WILL HAVE TO EARN IT BY PROVING YOURSELF IN SINGLE COMBAT.
IT'S A LITTLE EARLY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO BE MAKING DEMANDS OF ME.
WHERE ARE YOUR MANNERS?

VERY WELL, TERSE.
I AM TRINADMA SAMBHAVA DEVI.
I FORMALLY CHALLENGE YOU TO OPEN-HANDED COMBAT.
EXCELLENT!
I AM ARIC YUEN-SON TERSE FORMERLY OF THE SEVEN DRAGONS--AND I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE!
THE RULES ARE SIMPLE: IF YOU WIN, THE DATA STICK IS YOURS. IF YOU LOSE...WELL, LET'S JUST SAY YOU WILL BE IN NO CONDITION TO EXPERIENCE THE BITTER TASTE OF DEFEAT.
LET US BEGIN!

SHFPT
FWOOOOOOSH
FWIP
YOU'RE FAST! THAT IS GOOD...
THOUGH YOU MAY WANT TO RETHINK YOUR STRATEGY!

HAH!
YANK
THWACK
I HAVE FOUGHT YOUR KIND BEFORE.
YOUR COMBAT VEILS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN A NUISANCE TO ME.
THEN I TRUST YOU WILL NOT MIND A FURTHER ANNOYANCE!

SWOOP
SLAM
FWAP

KRACK
LESS TALK, MORE FIGHTING!
VERY IMPRESSIVE.
YOUR SKILLS ARE ALL I HOPED THEY WOULD BE.
CRACK

KOOM
HHOK!
HAH!
YOU FIGHT WITH A FEROCITY I HAVE RARELY SEEN IN A TANTRIKA...
GOOD... IT WILL MAKE THIS VICTORY ALL THE SWEETER!
CRASH

YOUR CONSTANT BANTER IS BEGINNING TO ANNOY ME!
WHOOSH
WHOOSH
THEN PERHAPS I SHOULD END THIS NOW!
THWACK
SLICE
EYAGH!!

THWAMM
THIS CONTEST IS FAR FROM OVER!
WHOOP
WHOOP
YOU DO YOUR PEOPLE CREDIT, LADY DEVI.
NO ONE HAS LASTED THIS LONG IN A FIGHT WITH ME FOR MANY YEARS.

FWOOM
FWIP
HURK!
FWAMM
AHHH!!!
CRACK

PHEEEWW
FWIP
THOOOM

KRUNK
YIELD, ARIC.
I HAVE NO WISH TO INJURE YOU PERMANENTLY.
Y-YOU KNOW I CANNOT DO THAT WHILE I STILL REMAIN CONSCIOUS...
I MUST KNOW... WHOSE T-TECHNIQUE IS SUPERIOR.
IT IS A SHAME TWO WARRIORS SUCH AS WE MUST MEET AS ENEMIES.
IF CIRCUMSTANCES HAD BEEN DIFFERENT, I AM SURE WE WOULD HAVE--
FLIP

ARGH!!!
TANTRIKA, YOU WISH TO KNOW WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF YOUR HERETICAL SECT OF UNBELIEVERS... LOOK NO FURTHER.
SAVE YOUR BREATH, ARIC TERSE.
FOR IT MAY WELL BE YOUR LAST.
I AM TITUS BRAILLE, INQUISITOR OF THE HOLY COG AND PRIME CONFESSOR FOR HIS GRAND REVERENCE.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
I AM MERELY TYING UP ONE OF THREE LOOSE ENDS.
I BELIEVE THE REMAINING TWO ARE ON YOUR SHIP.
THAT WOULD BE MY SHIP, HANDSOME.
THE ONLY WAY YOU'RE GETTING ABOARD IS OVER MY DEAD BODY.
THAT CAN BE ARRANGED.
CLACK
CRRCHH
NNGH!

FOOLISH GIRL!! YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE!!
GO AWAY NOW AND LET THE ADULTS TALK!
WHAM
ABBEY?!
YOU BASTARD! IF YOU'VE HURT HER...

SUCH BRAVADO.
SLAM
YOUR ARROGANT FRIEND IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE TO ME.
YOU SHOULD BE FAR MORE CONCERNED WITH YOUR OWN WELL BEING!!

AHH!
YOU TWO HAVE LED ME ON QUITE THE MERRY CHASE
FWZZZT
AHHH!!!
NOW THAT THE CHASE IS DONE, THE HOLY CLEANSING MAY BEGIN!
SLAM
SOON, LITTLE ONE, YOU WILL JOIN YOUR PEOPLE IN OBLIVION!
WHY, BRAILLE?
WHAT DID THE TANTRIKA EVER DO TO YOU OR THE COG TO WARRANT THEIR TOTAL EXTINCTION?
THWACK
YOU EXIST!!

ABBEY... Y-YOU ARE ALIVE...
T-TRINA...
TAKE MY HAND. IT'S THE ONLY W-WAY WE CAN DEFEAT B-BRAILLE...
B-BUT...
PLEASE, ABBEY... D-DO YOU TRUST ME?
THEN TAKE MY HAND.
OF COURSE I DO, BUT...
MAKE PEACE WITH WHATEVER HEATHEN GODS YOU PRAY TO.
YOUR TIME OF JUDGMENT HAS COME AND I HAVE FOUND YOU BOTH... WANTING.
MOTHER OF CREATION!! HELP OUR PLEA AND HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED!!

THIS FEEBLE LIGHT SHOW ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE.
HEATHEN MAGICS AND CHEAP CHICANERY CANNOT SAVE YOU NOW.
FWOOM
Tantrika do not resort to parlor tricks!

FRAAAK
DO YOU REALLY THINK THIS NEW MANIFESTATION WILL DETER A TRUE WARRIOR OF THE CLOTH?!
FWISH
You are no warrior, Titus Braille.
And we are no tricksters.
We are the embodiment of the female spirit.
The true Alpha and Omega. We have the ability to create life--
--or to destroy it!
KA-BOOM
FOOM
BAM
VZZZSH

At our hands, you will learn what it feels like to be helpless...
...to be one of the weak your kind so often preys upon.
I AM FAR FROM HELPLESS, YOU HEATHEH ABOMINATION!!
YOUR DESTRUCTION SHALL BE MY GREATEST VICTORY!!
Death and murder are not victories to be celebrated.

WHAP
URK!
N-NO...
KOOM
HURF!
You force your beliefs on others rather than face your own doubts.
You bully and intimidate to hide your own fear and uncertainty.
KA-BOOOOM

That is why you will always be inferior.
That is why you will always fail!
Sad, pathetic little man...
CLINK
CLINK
KA-BOOM

Great Mother, we thank you for this gift of power.
Grant us the wisdom of your earthly ways...
...and let this joining conclude, cleansing all who are touched by your divine light.
WWOOSH
EASY, ABBEY.
WHOA... WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
LAST THING I REMEMBER, BRAILLE WAS KICKING OUR ASSES...

THERE IS AN ANCIENT TANTRIKA TECHNIQUE CALLED JOINING THAT FUSES THE SOUL ENERGY OR DIVINE SPARK OF TWO KINDRED SPIRITS.
I USED THAT ENERGY TO CHANNEL THE ESSENCE OF THE DARK GODDESS KALI MA WHO IS BOTH THE LADY OF CREATION AND THE MISTRESS OF DESTRUCTION.
TOGETHER, WE PROVED MORE THAN THE INQUISITOR WAS ABLE TO HANDLE.
SO I SEE.
YOU DIDN'T... YOU KNOW...?
AS YOU ARE SO FOUND OF SAYING... HE WILL LIVE. THOUGH HE WILL BE SOMEWHAT THE WORSE FOR WEAR AFTER OUR ENCOUNTER.
WELL DONE, LADY DEVI.
YOUR SKILLS FAR EXCEED ANYTHING I HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED.

I MUST CONCEDE VICTORY TO YOU AND ADMIT THAT I WAS THE ONLY RUNNER INVOLVED IN THE RAID ON RAMA WHO KNEW THAT BRAILLE WAS A COG INQUISITOR.
...AND ALL I WAS CONCERNED WITH WAS THAT I WOULD BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO PIT MY SKILLS AGAINST A RACE OF THE GREATEST FIGHTERS IN THE GALAXY.
HE NEVER SAW FIT TO SHARE THE REASONS WHY THE COG AND THE CROWN BOTH WISHED TO ERADICATE THE TANTRIKA...
THIS DATA STICK MAY PROVIDE SOME OF THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK, BUT I FEAR IT WILL ALSO RAISE MANY MORE QUESTIONS.
I GIVE IT TO YOU WITH NO REGRETS AND A PROMISE...
TOSS
FLIP
...THAT WE WILL MEET AGAIN!

I LOOK FORWARD TO IT.
SHOULDN'T WE GO AFTER HIM?
NO. I HAVE WHAT I CAME HERE FOR.
I WILL SEE ARIC TERSE AGAIN, OF THAT I AM SURE.
FOR NOW, I HAVE MUCH TO CONSIDER.
SO WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?
IF THE COG AND CROWN FEAR THE TANTRIKA FAITH SO MUCH, PERHAPS IT IS TIME WE REBUILD IT.
WAIT A MINUTE, DID YOU JUST SAY ME?!
DOES THAT MEAN YOU'VE CHANGED YOUR MIND ABOUT TRAINING ME?!
YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE DANCE OF COMBAT...
BUT IF YOU ARE STILL SERIOUS ABOUT LEARNING THE WAYS OF THE TANTRIKA...
...I WOULD BE HONORED IF YOU WOULD BECOME MY APPRENTICE.

OH, THANK YOU, TRINA! I KNEW YOU'D COME AROUND EVENTUALLY! I SWEAR YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED!
Uh, sorry about that I think I got a little carried away...
No need to apologize. Your exuberance only reiterates the fact that I am making the right choice.
SO WHERE DO WE START?
RAMA. I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER PLACE TO REBUILD THE TANTRIKA FAITH THAN ON THE PLANET THAT HELPED GIVE BIRTH TO IT.
UH...SINCE I'M GOING TO BE YOUR *APPRENTICE,* CAN I MAKE ONE *SMALL* REQUEST?
WHAT DO YOU REQUIRE?
CAN YOU STOP CALLING ME *ABIGAIL?* IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I'M A LITTLE KID.
CERTAINLY, ABBEY. ARE THERE ANY MORE REQUESTS I MIGHT FILL?
NOPE, THAT'LL DO IT FOR NOW. RAMA, HERE WE *COME!*

To be Continued

Writer: Ken Faggio

Ken was born in the Bronx, New York. An avid reader of comics and manga since early childhood, his fascination with larger than life stories and the characters that filled them led to an interest in world mythology and folklore, as well as a desire to pursue a career as a writer. Ken has currently self-published two comics (*A Time Out Of Mind* and *One Thousand Faces*) and he is currently at work on *Braids of the Gorgon*, an four-issue comic miniseries. In addition to writing, Ken is also an accomplished musician, having played bass guitar for over fifteen years while touring the United States, Canada and Mexico. He has released eight CDs with such underground bands as Morpheus Descends, Kung-Fu Jesus and Deadspeak. Recently Ken has been performing live as bassist and vocalist for a conspiracy theory themed band named Cabal 34. He currently lives in upstate New York with his wife Evelyn, their son Logan and their two cats, Mina and Callisto.

Artist: Fernando Furukawa

Born in Argentina, Fernando is the son of a German father and a Japanese mother. Fernando has been drawing since he was a small child and furthered his artistic education under the tutelage of local art professors Pier Brito and Feliciano Garcia Zecchin. He began his professional artist career at age 19 and was published in several local magazines. This led to him publishing his own series (along with writer Mauro Mantella and artist Rocio Zucchi) called *TIME: 5*. His recent works include his job as lead artist for an online web series, drawing two stories for TOKYOPOP's *Warcraft: Legends* anthology series, as well as being the artist for the upcoming *StarCraft: Ghost Academy* series, also from TOKYOPOP.

TAKE IT OFF, TAKE IT ALL OFF
A STRIPPED-DOWN LOOK AT THE CREATION OF TANTRIC STRIPFIGHTER TRINA

TANTRIC STRIPFIGHTER TRINA

PAGE SEVENTEEN (four panels)

Panel 1. Trina steps away from Salvo and drops her burka to the floor. She is wearing knee high white boots and both of her legs are bare. She has a long sash draped diagonally across her waist and she is wearing a top similar to a halter top with thick straps. She has two fighting veils attached to her arms that are weighted at the ends.

1. TRINA — Trina Devi, Chimera Corporation, Jumper Retrieval Squad. I am here to return you to Terran custody.

Panel 2. Salvo looks at Trina and raises an eyebrow. Abbey has stood up and is reaching for the double barreled pistol strapped to her leg.

2. SALVO — A bounty hunter, huh?

3. SALVO — What're you gonna do if I don't want to go, lap dance me into submission?

Panel 3. Trina holds out her arms and grips the veils attached to them. Two bikers holding small Las pistols are approaching her on either side.

4. TRINA — In a way.

Panel 4. Small panel, close up of Salvo looking menacing.

5. SALVO — If this is some kind of joke, I'm not laughing.

TANTRIC STRIPFIGHTER TRINA

PAGE EIGHTEEN (four panels)

Panel 1. Trina leaps high into the air as the two bikers with the pistols move closer.

1. TRINA — This is no joke.

Panel 2. Trina's veils whip around the guns.

2. SFX — THIIP!
THIIP!

Panel 3. Close up of Trina.

3. TRINA — You are coming with me!

Panel 4. She leaps up again and does a split in midair, kicking both of the bikers in the face.

4. SFX — CRACK!

5. SFX — CHUD!

Ken started writing the book in 2006. At the time it was pitched to TOKYOPOP, he was working with a separate artist.

TOKYOPOP liked the idea, but wanted a new artist. Ken wrote a script.

Fernando's first sample page was pretty busy. There's a lot of panels, and each panel is full of information. TOKYOPOP vetoed it.

The second attempt: A lot less stuff going on, but the panels are going every which way. Not to mention the panty shot seems forced...

The third time around, the panels got nice and spread out.
But Trina herself hadn't yet morphed into a sexy star.

Hotcha! Trina's sexy, Abbey's powerful and Fernando's showing his thang for fanservice with a non-so-tastefully placed sword. These bold, boobilicious sample pages sealed the deal—and for the first time, you can see them too.

PIN-UP GALLERY
A STRIPPED-DOWN LOOK AT THE DESIGN EVOLUTION OF TANTRIC STRIPFIGHTER TRINA

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